









# ALBERT YORK

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

*in cooperation with* DAVIS & LANGDALE COMPANY



*Roy Davis gave Albert York his first exhibition in 1963 and advocated for his work with dedication and deep conviction. He relished the opportunity to see paintings by the artist and passionately anticipated the exhibition this publication accompanies. Roy passed away on September 8th of this year. This exhibition and publication are dedicated to him.*



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## FOREWORD

In the winter of 1983, Matthew Marks and I were in Boston looking at art. There was an Albert York show at the Museum of Fine Arts. Matthew knew about York — I don't recall how, but then he seemed aware of a great many things. He told me, with supreme authority and intense curiosity, "This is an artist we must look at."

At the museum there were twenty paintings hanging in a small gallery on the ground floor of a recently completed addition. There was an Indian chief and brave standing side by side, sketched in the minimum number of brushstrokes necessary to render them perfectly present; a knight in armor and a crocodile about to enter into a combat driven by the rhythm of their placement in pictorial space; several paintings of cows whose lonely, stolid stances made the connection between modesty and dignity absolutely clear; and arrangements of flowers caught between fullness and decay that were gorgeous because of their simplicity and incipient fading.

The show was part of a focus on contemporary realism, but this was not realism like that of Fairfield Porter, who had written about York and whose work was shown at the museum in a concurrent and much larger one-man exhibition, nor that of Andrew Wyeth or any other American painter whose canvases depict narrative moments, objects, people, the view out a window, the clouds in the sky on a particular summer day in Maine. It was not realism at all. It was painting about what a flower or a cow or trees in a field might ideally be; about what it meant to love something so much you struggled to fix it — not as you saw it, but as you felt it, hoping you could keep the effect of its beauty with you forever. It was about loving painting so much that you tried, with a few brushes and a plank of wood or a length of canvas, to do all that.

There was nothing old-fashioned about it, although its debt to Eakins and Ryder, to Manet and Morandi, remained obvious. The materiality of York's paint, the freshness of his color, and the sobriety of his brushstrokes rendered his subjects, and thus his pictures, insistently present. They spoke of a faith in the medium — as if York was trying to be worthy of painting the way the humbly religious try to be worthy before God — that was exceptionally timely. So much attention was being paid to painters like Anselm Kiefer, Julian Schnabel, and Susan Rothenberg just then. They were testing their ability to render one thing — movement, national histories, landscapes — into another by putting paint on ground. Although the bombast of broken plates and pasted masses of hay were not York's thing, these artists' interest, like his, lay in what painting could be.

I was twenty-four and agog at the agitated figuration and bold colors of the Italian neo-expressionists, who were at their height of popularity, but we flew



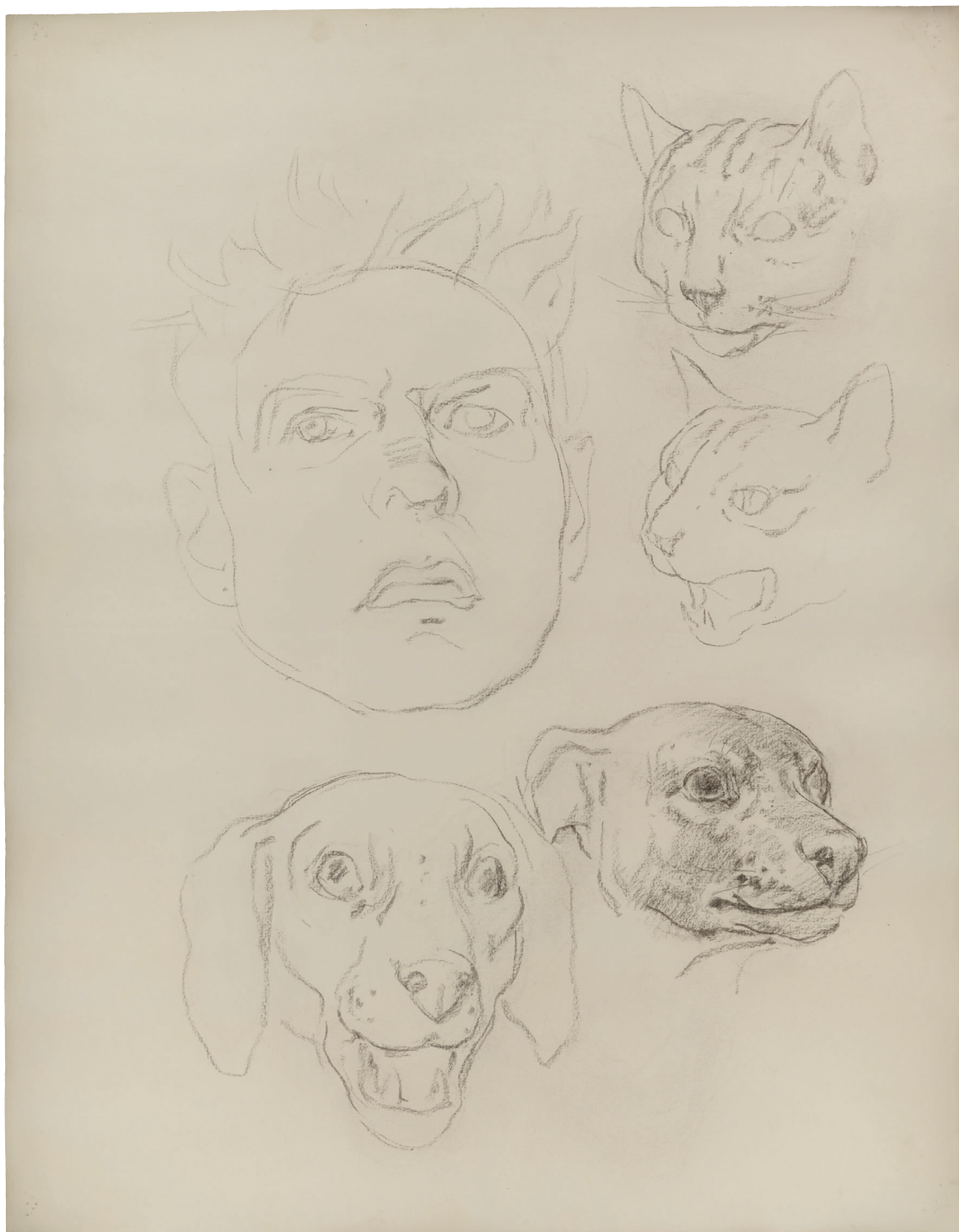
home from Boston hell-bent on small paintings of crocodiles and Indians — York's pictures are always small — and went straight to Davis & Langdale, which then had a space on the second floor of a red brick building on Madison Avenue at 65th Street. Roy Davis had given York his first show in 1963, and since then he and his wife, Cecily Langdale, have been the artist's only dealers. There were few gallery owners back then who were willing to give the time of day to two importunate kids, but, devoted to the artist, Cecily and Roy received us with forbearance and helped us generously, patiently, over many visits, for years, although neither one of us succeeded in acquiring an Indian or a crocodile.

York painted only six of the former and two of the latter, one of them his last painting, perhaps unfinished. He worked in fits and starts and produced not much over a career of thirty years. He was notoriously reclusive and in later years sent his paintings to the gallery wrapped in brown paper, without warning and by regular mail. We once speculated that Roy was really Albert York — another fantasy we attached to these gloriously modest, visionary pictures, as if, by cracking the mystery of who the artist was, we could finally understand their enigmatic pull. In truth, he was a reticent man quietly painting in his basement out east, a lesson that proves you can just do your own thing in life and make the greatest beauty of it.

Today, when painting again seems vital, urgently explored, and vigorously deconstructed, when abstraction and figuration and the materiality of the medium figure centrally in aesthetic and theoretical discussion, York's work seems even more germane than it did when we first encountered it more than thirty years ago. York's effort to fix his subjects, and his sense of them, gives his pictures an implicit conceptual underpinning and signal that painting is by its nature an abstraction and an act of refinement based on tradition, technique, and formal rigor. It's an act rooted in time that does not need to be "deconstructed." Its mechanics, and the agency of the painter, are obvious if you just look. His art expresses with quiet authority things that cannot be said in words.

*Joshua Mack*





1. *Self Portrait with Heads of Two Cats and Two Dogs*, 1979. Charcoal on paper.

## ARTIST UNKNOWN

*Calvin Tomkins*

Albert York may be the most highly admired unknown artist in America. Ask any contemporary dealer or collector what he thinks of York's paintings, and nineteen times out of twenty you will get a blank stare. This is amazing when you consider that York has had twelve one-man shows in New York over the last thirty-two years, and that his work has received very favorable and sometimes awed notices from any number of well-known critics. Reviewing York's first show, in 1963, at the Davis Galleries on East 60th Street, the *Art News* critic Lawrence Campbell wrote, "His small paintings of fields, trees, ponds, a bird, a bull, a face or two, a figure in front of a wood, shine with the poetry of a Ryder; and without looking much like a Ryder, either." That is still a good description of York's work, which has changed very little over three decades. His colors are lighter than they used to be, and his paint handling is more seductive, but the scale and the format of his pictures have remained the same — slightly less than a foot square in most cases — and there has been no letup in the mysterious tension that makes his images indelible.

Those who do know about Albert York tend to be fanatical in their admiration. The painter Susan Rothenberg, who chose York for the 1984 "Artists Choose Artists" show at the CDS Gallery, on the Upper East Side, has said that she "just fell in love with the beauty and simplicity and purity of the work" and also with a certain raw, awkward quality — a sense that "each time he paints, he paints for the first time." The sculptor Robert Grosvenor owns two York landscapes, and he takes them with him, in a box he made for the purpose, when he leaves home for a few days. "I really need them around me, somehow," he told me recently. The late Jacqueline Onassis owned six York paintings, the last of which was given to her by her friend Maurice Tempelman just a short time before she died. Edward Gorey, the artist and book illustrator, has five, and says he would buy anything of York's, sight unseen, if anything were available. (A new painting by York could bring at least twenty thousand dollars today, and quite possibly a lot more than that.) Klaus Kertess, the curator who organized this year's Whitney Biennial, wanted to include York in the show but couldn't, because the Biennial is limited to work done within the last two years and York has not released a new painting in three years. Kertess did include York's work in a three-artist show of landscape paintings at the Parrish Art Museum, in Southampton, Long Island, in 1989. He worked closely with the two other artists involved, Jane Freilicher and April Gornik, but he didn't meet York then and hasn't met him since, and at the time neither Kertess nor anyone else at the museum knew for sure whether York, who lives only a few miles away, in Water Mill, ever came to see the show.

Leroy Davis and Cecily Langdale, York's longtime dealers, have had relatively little contact with the artist in recent years. York's rate of production declined precipitously



after the Parrish Museum show, and it stopped altogether in June of 1992. The Davises (Roy Davis and Cecily Langdale are married) try to buy back for the gallery any York that comes on the market. Their private collection covers all the characteristic York themes and includes several of the strange allegorical pictures that crop up in his work from time to time, such as the 1967 *Woman and Skeleton*, which shows a nude woman and a skeleton seated on the ground, having what looks like an animated conversation. *Woman and Skeleton* is in some ways the quintessential York painting. Although it obviously refers to the vanitas theme of earlier art — the woman holds a mirror in her left hand, and the skeleton is shouldering a scythe — the picture also manages to evoke Manet in the physicality of its paint handling, while locating the viewer in a murky, moonlit landscape that is somewhat ominous and full of ambiguity. Is the woman looking at herself in the mirror, or holding it up to reflect the skeleton's features? Is the skeleton male or female? The figures strain against the confines of the twelve-by-eleven-inch picture space, and are seemingly out of scale with a clump of trees directly behind them. Nothing quite fits. The effect is monumental and humorous at the same time.

It struck both the Davises as highly unlikely that York would agree to be interviewed. To everyone's surprise, though, he did. He showed up right on time at Bobby Van's restaurant, in Bridgehampton, where I had suggested that we meet. York turned out to be a rather handsome man in a gray tweed jacket: he had white hair, greenish-brown eyes, a square face with deep vertical lines framing the mouth, and not a trace of the hunted-animal look that his reputation had more or less led me to expect. York had a slow, rather formal way of talking. There were moments during our conversation that day and during a subsequent conversation when he clearly felt uncomfortable, and now and then he apologized for not answering a question adequately, but to me his answers seemed remarkably candid, thoughtful, and unself-conscious.

He was born in Detroit in 1928. His parents separated soon afterward — they were not married — and York grew up believing that his mother was dead. Since his father could not take care of him, he spent the first seven years of his life in a nursery/boarding school in Fenton, Michigan, a town near Flint. York's father, Albert, Sr., was born in London; his parents had emigrated to Canada when he was sixteen, and he had become a Canadian citizen and served in the Canadian Army during the First World War. After the war, he came down to Detroit and found a job as a metalworker in the automobile industry.

When York was fourteen, he was sent to live with his father's married sister, in Belleville, Ontario. He graduated from high school there five years later and enrolled in the Ontario College of Art. He had done a lot of drawing in grade school, and in high school he had taken painting lessons from a local artist. The first-year course at the Ontario College of Art was mostly drawing — drawing from plaster casts, still life drawing, and so forth — and the first year was as far as he got, because after that his father decided he should come home and attend the Society of Arts and Crafts, in Detroit. York was awarded a scholarship for his second year there. He used only part of it, though, because he was drafted into the Army in January of 1951. He spent two years in the Army, and saw active duty in the Korean War.



2. *Woman and Skeleton*, c. 1967. Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite.





Albert Pinkham Ryder. *The Tilers of the Sea*, c. 1880–85. Oil on wood. 11½ x 12 inches; 29 x 30.5 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. George A. Hearn Fund, 1915.

Discharged in 1952, York came straight to New York. While he had been in training with an Army Medical Corps in Seattle, he met a sergeant from the Bronx who had attended the Art Students League, and he decided that this was what he wanted to do when he got out. The Art Students League fees were too high, though, so York signed up instead for the evening painting classes that Raphael Soyer was teaching, in two rooms on West 56th Street. Soyer, whose social realism ran to genre paintings of tired shopgirls and office workers, had a sensuous touch with paint. A great admirer of Degas and the French school, he passed this admiration on to his pupils, and he was certainly York's most important teacher, but York studied with him for only a short time. He had to take on all sorts of odd jobs to pay for the lessons and for his room and board, and after four or five months he found that he was just too tired at night to paint, so he quit painting and went to work full time. He had a lot of different jobs during the next five years. He worked on trucks in the garment district, loading and unloading heavy bolts of cloth. What got him out of this dead period was going to work in Robert Kulicke's picture-frame workshop.

Robert Kulicke is famous today for designing and developing a metal picture frame that virtually took over the contemporary frame market in the 1960s. Before that, he had

studied and mastered the ancient craft of wood-frame-making, and his shop, Kulicke Frames, on York Avenue at 73rd Street, was considered one of the best in the business. Being an artist himself — a painter — Kulicke liked to hire young artists to work for him. His best gilder was a man named Jerry Anderson, who had been in Raphael Soyer's class with Albert York; in 1957, when Kulicke needed another gilder, Anderson recommended York, and Kulicke took him on and trained him. York became a first-rate gilder, according to Kulicke — deft, careful, completely reliable, and incredibly shy. "I spent hours talking to him in the shop," Kulicke recalls — Kulicke is a world-class talker — "but I don't recall a single thing he ever said except 'Yes,' 'No,' or 'Maybe.'"

At that time, York still wasn't doing any painting or drawing. He didn't start again until 1959 or 1960. Everybody's favorite Albert York story is that his wife didn't know he was an artist until six months after they were married, when she came into their kitchen one day and saw him drawing horses to amuse one of her children. When I asked York about this, he looked mystified. He and Virginia Mann Caldwell, whom he met at a party in an artist's loft in 1959, had taken her two children on a four-month trip to France in 1960, before they were married, he said, and he had brought along his paintbox and done a lot of painting in the French countryside. Since the story came originally from Virginia, who told it to Roy Davis, it may have been simply that she did not know he was an artist when they first met; at that time, York hadn't painted for six or seven years, and he certainly did not consider himself an artist.

The trip to Europe was Virginia's idea. She had spent her junior year at the Sorbonne when she was a Barnard College student, and later on she and her first husband had lived in Paris for a time, working for the Marshall Plan. York said, with a chuckle, "She decided we were going to France, so we went to France." They spent a month in Paris, but only one day in the Louvre. ("The Louvre is so huge, and we had the youngsters with us, and they kept disappearing.") From Paris they worked their way south, and they ended up in a pension just outside Toulon. This was where York really started painting again. He took his paintbox out into the fields, like an Impressionist. The pictures he painted were nothing like Impressionism, though; they were small, concentrated, and rather dark, with a predominance of green and blue halftones. He had no interest in reproducing specific landscapes. "I would see this tree or that tree, and put it down on the panel, but rearrange the whole thing," he said. "I invented it. It came to mind as I was working."

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York and Caldwell returned to New York in the late summer of 1960, and got married in October. For the next two years, they lived in an apartment on East 84th Street. York went back to work at Kulicke Frames, but he started going there at 5:00 AM so he could quit at around 3:00 and have an hour or so to paint before dark. He painted mostly in Central Park, on small wooden panels; sometimes he would glue canvas to them first, but mostly he painted on the wood itself. He also spent a lot of time in museums during this period. "I looked at just about everything

in the Metropolitan,” he told me. He liked the work of the Ashcan School painters, George Bellows and John Sloan and Robert Henri and George Luks, and he developed a reverence for Manet and Cézanne, and also for certain Old Masters — Giovanni Bellini’s *St. Francis in the Desert*, at the Frick, made a profound impression on him — but the painter who then excited him most was Albert Pinkham Ryder. He remembers seeing at the Metropolitan a temporary installation of paintings by Ryder, Eastman Johnson, Winslow Homer, and several other Americans. “The Ryders were the only ones that held up, for me,” he said. “They were so small, but so strong that they outdid everything else in the room. The whole universe was there in those small pictures. Ryder knew how to fit together the negative and positive forms — clouds, sky, trees, the sea. He locked it all in.”

Contemporary art barely registered on York’s aesthetic compass. He knew that Abstract Expressionism had become the dominant influence both here and abroad, and he also knew that it had nothing to do with him. “It was a different world,” he said. “Naturally it froze you — made you think, What are you doing with your tiny panels?” He stayed with his tiny panels, which never looked like miniatures; seen from a distance, they had a monumental presence that caught and held the eye. Jerry Anderson saw a few of them, and persuaded York to show them to Bob Kulicke. “I immediately saw it was terrific work,” Kulicke recalls. “You know, I’m a good painter, but Al is a great painter. Better than I am, the prick.” Kulicke got in touch with his friend and colleague Roy Davis, who ran a small art gallery that had started out as a showroom for Kulicke Frames, and told him about Al York. Davis had also wanted to be a painter; he and Kulicke had been classmates at the Tyler School of Art, in Philadelphia. Although Davis no longer painted, he had a keen eye for the sort of painterly touch that was rapidly becoming obsolete in art, and he immediately invited York to join the gallery. This was in 1962, the year that Pop art broke into the clear as the rambunctious antidote to Abstract Expressionism. Al York and the mainstream of modern art were headed in opposite directions.

Davis gave York his first show the following March. It got good reviews (including Lawrence Campbell’s in *Art News*), and most of the paintings were sold, at prices that sound ridiculous today — a hundred and fifty to four hundred dollars — but were respectable then. York and his wife and his two stepchildren had left the city by that time and moved out to East Hampton, where Virginia’s parents had a house. They rented a small house on Darby Lane, and York took the train into the city five days a week to work at Kulicke’s. Eventually, the commuting got to be too much for him. He quit Kulicke’s, and found work painting houses and doing rough carpentry in the East Hampton area. He also painted a lot of pictures in those years, partly “to keep the income going, you know, support the family.” Most of his pictures were on wood. There was always scrap lumber around the construction sites he worked on, and he would salvage a good-sized piece and cut it into usable squares. Every so often, he brought his paintings in to Davis Galleries himself, unsigned and untitled, in a brown paper bag. (Later on, when he stopped coming into town, he wrapped them in brown paper and sent them by ordinary mail.) Some of his best work dates from the





Giovanni Bellini. *St. Francis in the Desert*, c. 1475-78. Oil and tempera on poplar panel.  
48 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 55 $\frac{5}{16}$  inches; 124 x 141 cm. The Frick Collection, New York. Henry Clay Frick Bequest.

1960s — the dense, brooding landscapes with two or three trees and a flash of water in the middle distance. They are simple yet compelling images that show an awareness of art history (the landscape tradition established in the seventeenth century by Claude Lorrain) but at the same time project a very contemporary sense of unease. He also painted still lifes, farmhouses, human figures in landscapes, and cows. York tends to think of his cow pictures as “potboiling,” because he often fell back on them when he didn’t have another subject in mind. They were not particularly easy to like — not nearly as ingratiating to the eye as his still lifes of flowers. An interior decorator used to come to the gallery and buy several York paintings at a time, to place in apartments she was decorating. That bothered Roy Davis — he envisioned York landscapes being used as decorative “accents” in back hallways, where nobody would ever look at them — but the Yorks obviously needed the money. They had moved into Virginia’s parents’ house, on Sag Harbor Road, which she had inherited. York never suggested that his prices should be any higher. Almost always, when he bought or mailed in a new painting he said that it wasn’t good enough, and that he hoped to do better with the next one.

York kept in touch with his father, who had moved back to Ontario. In 1972, when the elder York was dying of cancer, he confided to his son a stunning piece of news: Albert’s mother was still alive. She was living in Florida, and was a successful real-estate

broker there. Her husband had died recently, and she and York's father had re-established contact, and now she wanted to see Albert. "Meeting her for the first time was pretty rough," according to York, but he and his mother managed to work out a relationship. After his father died, in 1973, York and his mother went to Canada together to settle the estate. He did a painting of her there, sitting in the grass; her features are barely distinguishable, as is the case in most of his figurative paintings. Some years later, York began receiving a small income from a trust fund that his mother had set up in his name. The Davises say that it was harder to get pictures out of him after that.

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York's pictures became stranger. He painted a burly semi-nude man holding a snake. (Snakes also appear in some of his landscape paintings.) He did a *Reclining Female Nude with Cat*, which was a weird takeoff on Manet's *Olympia*. The nude, like all of York's nudes, is graceless and anti-erotic, and the cat is huge — way out of normal scale. Blocky, totemic-looking Indians appear in several paintings. One of them depicts a man in armor, an Indian, and a crocodile in a tropical setting; it was done during or shortly after a visit to his mother in Florida. The men and women in York's pictures often wear nineteenth-century clothing — long skirts and old-fashioned hats. He paints them this way, he told me, because today's clothes are so uninteresting visually. During the 1970s, York spent a lot of time in the East Hampton Library, reading books on art history. Art books and catalogues sometimes gave him ideas for paintings. Since he had no live models to pose for him (his wife wouldn't do it), he used Manet's *Olympia* instead. "I didn't copy it," he said. "Just painted it from memory. That's why you get that chunky figure." He doesn't like his version much. To him it looks "like a student's piece of work."

At one point, York attended a sketch class that the artists Aaron Shikler and David Levine had started in New York, with live models who would hold the same pose over a number of sessions. York felt that he needed to do more drawing, even though he never used drawings as preliminary studies for his paintings. At the very first sketch class he attended, though, a sociable colleague came over to look at what he was doing, and York packed up his things, walked out, and never went back.

It was ironic, his living out there on the East End of Long Island with all the wealthy collectors and dealers and successful artists, not to mention the stockbrokers and the virtuosos of arbitrage. York had no contact with any of them. Fairfield Porter, who was a respected critic as well as an artist, looked him up in the 1960s. Porter put York in a 1965 group show at the Parrish Art Museum, in Southampton, and wrote a brief essay for the catalogue of York's 1975 show at the Davis & Long Company. (Roy Davis had gone into business with Meredith Long by then, and they had opened a large and ambitious gallery on Madison Avenue.) York and Porter had two or three conversations, but that was it; they did not become friends. Some people wondered whether Albert York really existed. There was speculation that he might be a pseudonym for an established artist with a reputation for working in a completely different style.





3. *Reclining Female Nude with Cat*, 1978. Oil on wood.





4. *Three Red Tulips in a Landscape with Horse and Rider*, 1982. Oil on wood.

The Yorks moved away from the East End in 1981. Virginia sold the house on Sag Harbor Road and bought an old house in Philadelphia, to be near her daughter. York rented a studio nearby, but nothing felt right about it, and after three months he gave it up and moved back to Long Island. For the next two years, he and Virginia lived separately, getting together occasionally on weekends or holidays. York lived in rented houses in the East Hampton area and, for a few months, outside Narragansett, Rhode Island. Living alone, with only a dog for company, seemed to make him much more productive. Some of his strongest paintings date from those two years: *Carnations in a Blue Can with a Beetle in a Landscape*, for example, and *Three Red Tulips in a Landscape with Horse and Rider*. These paintings introduce a new element — still life juxtaposed with landscape. In each of them, a floral still life is placed in the foreground of a landscape, with unsettling results: the flowers seem huge, and they make the background even more miragelike than it usually is in York's landscapes. In the second painting, three gigantic, Brobdingnagian tulips dwarf a shadowy horse and rider (Ryder?) just entering the picture from its right edge. The picture reads like a hallucination — real and unreal held in the same taut embrace.

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Several times during our conversations, York referred to his work as being out of date. "The modern world just passes me by," he said wryly, without self-pity. "I don't notice it. I missed the train." But during the 1980s the modern world kept rediscovering Albert York. His prices rose steadily; by the middle of the decade Davis was selling his paintings for five thousand dollars and more. Although York barely registered in the booming, publicity-mad art market of the period, the people who bought his work now tended to be involved with contemporary art — people like Susan Rothenberg, and the future dealer Matthew Marks (he started buying York paintings in 1983, when he was a twenty-year-old college student), and the avant-garde collectors Carl Lobell and Werner Kramarsky. Kramarsky bought *Three Red Tulips in a Landscape with Horse and Rider* in 1982 and the *Olympia* painting in 1984. Several museums became interested in York's work around that time. The Cleveland Museum acquired *Bird with Dead Moth* [plate 42]. The Boston Museum of Fine Arts mounted a small Albert York exhibit in 1982, and the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston included York in a group show called "American Still Life 1945–1983," which went on tour to four other museums; Linda Cathcart, the Houston museum's director, wanted to do a full-dress York retrospective, but she also wanted to meet the artist and discuss it with him, and that, apparently, was asking too much. In spite of all this activity, most people seemed not to have heard of Albert York. It almost proved that if you really wanted to be left alone you could be. A lot of East Enders read and discussed Virginia York's letters to the editor of the *East Hampton Star* about world mythology. (Virginia York, who also writes poems, has been working for years on a book about mythology.) Very few of the local people knew then or know now that her husband is an artist.

York had not been consulted about any of the museum shows in which his paintings were included. The curators worked through Roy Davis, who has become, over the years, more and more protective of York's privacy. By 1982, Davis was no longer in partnership with Meredith Long, and in 1985 the gallery had moved back into its original quarters, at 231 East 60th Street, under the name Davis & Langdale Company. When Klaus Kertess decided to put York in his 1989 show of three Long Island landscape painters at the Parrish Art Museum, the Davises discouraged him from trying to get in touch with York. They were afraid that if York knew about the show in advance he might refuse to be in it. York did go to see the Parrish Museum show, shortly before it closed, and the experience was deeply painful for him. "I felt pretty upset about what I'd been doing for these last years," he told me. "It's pretty lousy — pardon the word — work. Pretty bad. It has no relation to good painting. I don't recognize myself in those things. I would like to do better. But, of course, it's there, and probably I will never be able to change it."

Since "those things" included what York's admirers consider to be some of his most powerful work — early landscapes, *Woman and Skeleton*, *Reclining Female Nude with Cat*, *Three Red Tulips in a Landscape with Horse and Rider* — his reaction is hard to fathom. My impression was that York's notion of an acceptable painting hovers somewhere near the level of Bellini's *St. Francis in the Desert*. It may be that he truly has no idea how good his own work is, although that would suggest a naïveté that his intelligence belies. The last Parrish Museum show more or less stopped him in his tracks, at any rate, and he has been struggling ever since to find his way again. "I just don't know exactly where I am right now," he said, "or where I'm going." When I asked what it was about his work that he found so inadequate, he mentioned scale and color — he would like his paintings to be larger and more colorful. "I'm a black-and-white painter," he said. Black and white? "Well, light blue and dark green. Raphael Soyer tried to get me out of it. There are no reds in there, no oranges, no complement to the blues. I looked at the catalogue of a Seurat show a few years ago. Wonderful painter, marvelous with color. His little panels vibrate, they come to life. You look at one of my things and it's really dead."

The last painting that York sent in to the gallery was a still life of flowers, lusciously painted, with delicate greens, light blue, peach, rose, and a good deal of yellow ochre. That was three years ago. Roy Davis has a mental image of York laboring on a picture and then scraping it down to the bare wood over and over again. York was often inclined to scrape his panels down and start over; in the past, he used to tell the Davises that he was finishing a still life, and two weeks later they would receive a cow painting. "What Al doesn't understand is that in art you never hit what you're aiming at, but the difference may not be downward," Bob Kulicke says.

York conceded that he had been doing a lot of scraping down lately. He also gave me the impression that he worked every day. "I work in the basement right now, in the underworld," he said. "I get the early-morning sunlight through a couple of basement windows. I'm an early riser — up at 4:30 or 5:00 AM. I get my *New York Times* in Southampton — you can get it early at the 7-Eleven. I take a look at the world and have a cup of coffee, and then I get to work."





*Spring*, c. 1963. Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite.  
9 x 10¼ inches; 23 x 26 cm. Private collection.

I decided to ask him the impossible question: Why do you paint?

"I knew this was going to be difficult," he said, sighing. He put his cigarette out, slowly, and looked at the table. "I think we live in a paradise," he said. "This is a Garden of Eden, really it is. It might be the only paradise we ever know, and it's just so beautiful, with the trees and everything here, and you feel you want to paint it. Put it into a design. That's all I can say. It's been a rather trying business, this painting."

Had he ever found any real satisfaction in his work?

"Not really," came the slow reply. "Not really. Only one panel, maybe, one of the first I ever gave the Davises. It's a young woman with an arm or a hand on a tree, and there are some bushes, and a couple of other trees. I had red, green, blue, purple, and yellow — about the whole palette in that little panel. The drawing was good, a good rendering of the figure. It was our first summer in East Hampton after moving out from New York City, and out back of the house we had rented, in the next lot, there was a woman standing there, looking at her garden, and she had her hand up like that. She didn't see me. I stood there and memorized it. And then, about a week later, I went out there and put my paintbox down on the grass and painted it from memory. There was another element in my motivation, which is that my wife was mad as the devil at me at the time. Something about finances. So I had to get that bloody panel in to the Davises. Anyway, I sat down and did this thing, and it was one of the only things I really had satisfaction with."

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5. *Tivim Trees*, c. 1963. Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite.

## ALBERT YORK

*Fairfield Porter*

Our present day widespread discontent seems to be caused by the feeling that nothing any longer is worth while. Why do we feel this? I guess it is the influence of the astonishing accuracy and success of the scientific method which, separating the scientist from his observations, precludes value and emotional involvement. All that is left is quantity. "Everything that exists," says the psychologist E. L. Thorndike, "exists in a certain amount." Does it follow that, unless you can tell how much, there is nothing there? Until recently what was thought to be the scientific method has been accepted as guaranteeing the way toward a better, fuller, and more valuable life. Now we question this: we see that technology's application of the scientific method for these progressive purposes may very well finally finish us off.

The popularity of art today is a reaction against our disillusionment with an objectivity whose purposes are not ours. Albert York's paintings are popular partly because, as Gertrude Stein said of herself, he has a small audience; but, much more, as a reaction against the standards of a criticism based on the nineteenth-century belief in progressive change. This criticism, for all its old-fashioned materialism, looks for precognitive talent, for an ability to foresee the next fashion. York's paintings do not look like the next fashion but, rather, old-fashioned. Instead of mural-sized and bland, they are small and intense. They are approximately ten inches off-square. They do not contain the hectic emotion of expressionistic paintings, in which the painter, separated from his experience like the scientist from his experiment, projects his emotions onto the outside world. York's paintings are without pathetic fallacy. They contain an emotion that he has discovered outside himself. Take the painting of two trees, with a pond between them, in which one of the trees is reflected. It is for him the source of his imagination of the trees' lifelong experience. These two trees could be Baucis and Philemon after Zeus, at their death, changed them into trees to grant them their desire never to be separated. He identifies with his subject, whether a tree, a cow, a glass of flowers, or the woods. But not only with the subject: he also identifies with his materials, and with the translation of the identification with the cow into an identification with the paint he uses to present the cow. His watercolors do not so much express a masterful technique in watercolor (which they do) as an identification with the nature of the medium. Certainly part of the strong emotional appeal of these paintings is that he is not clever, and in no sense superior to the nature of his medium or the nature of the subject, but that he is at one with both. It is his identification, his empathy, that attracts. He does not "know" anything better than you who look at the painting; rather, he is able to identify with the mystery of the world that our civilization tries to keep us from being aware of.

*Originally published in Albert York (New York: Davis & Long Company, 1975)*



6. *Edge of the Forest*, c. 1963. Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite.



7. *Summer Trees*, c. 1963. Oil on canvas mounted on wood.





8. *The Meadow, East Hampton*, c. 1964. Oil on wood.

















11. *Two Zimmias*, c. 1965. Oil on canvas mounted on wood.







12. *Straw Flowers in Tin Container*, c. 1966. Oil on canvas mounted on wood.



13. *Buttercups and Green Leaves*, c. 1966. Oil on wood.













15. *Seated Woman with a Stork by a Pond in a Landscape*, 1966. Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite.



16. *Landscape with Trees and Snake*, 1967. Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite.













18. *Flying Figure in Landscape*, c. 1967. Oil on canvas.



19. *The Grey Dog*, c. 1967. Oil on wood.





20. *White Roses in a Glass Jar*, c. 1968. Oil on wood.











22. *Landscape with Fence and Bushes*, c. 1969. Oil and canvas mounted on Masonite.





23. *Landscape with Dirt Road, High Bank and Three Trees*, c. 1969. Oil on wood.











25. *Tropical Landscape with Palm and Snake*, c. 1969. Oil on canvas mounted on board.











27. *Two Anemones in a Glass*, 1970. Oil on canvas mounted on board.





























32. *Red Roses in Glass Jar*, 1978. Oil on wood.









































39. *An Indian on Horseback and an Indian Standing by Water in a Landscape*, 1981. Oil on Masonite.























43. *Two Pink Anemones in a Glass Vase in a Landscape*, 1982. Oil on Masonite.











45. *Zinnias and Pink Rose in Blue Pot*, 1983. Oil on wood.

































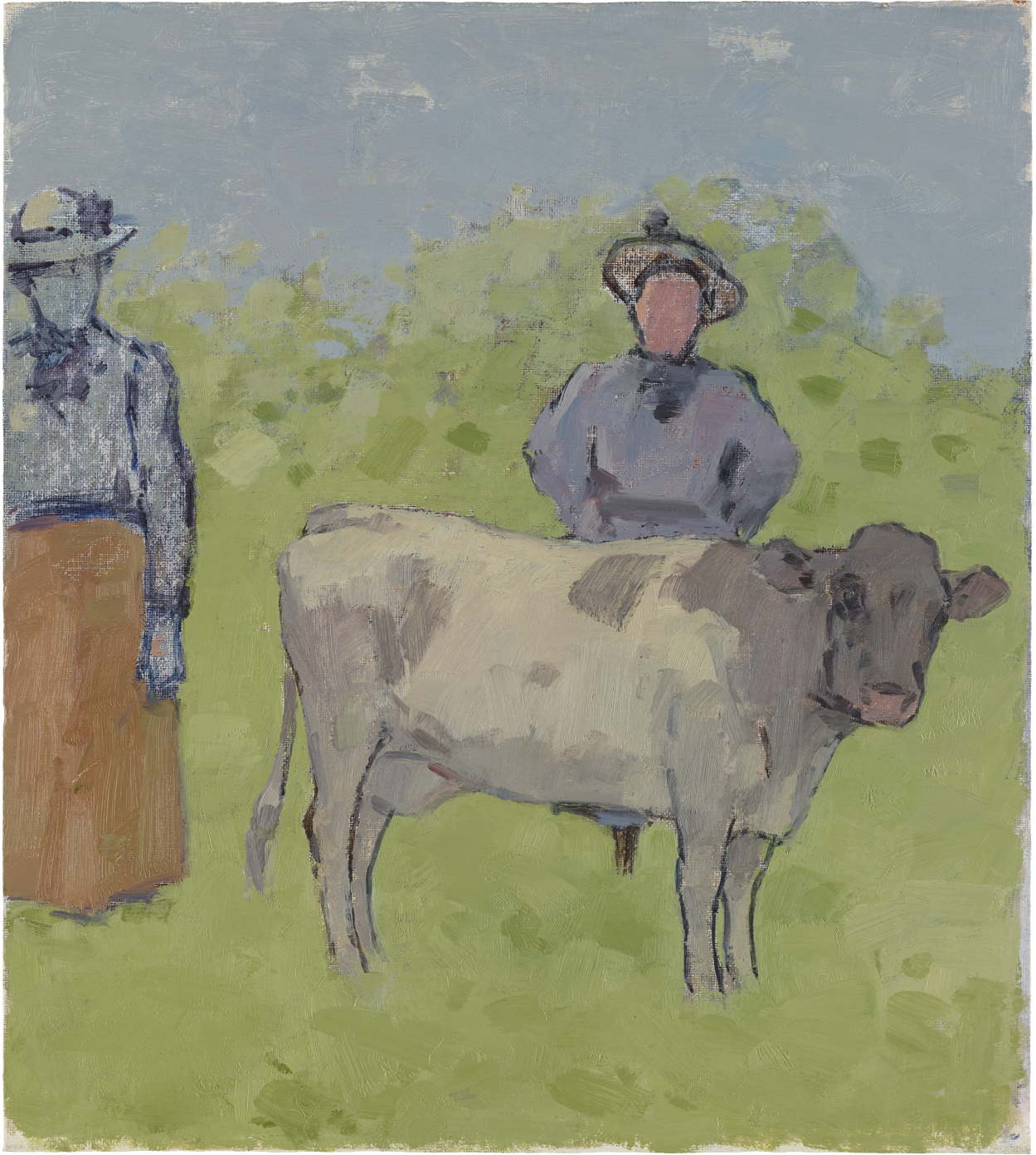
























55. *Landscape with Alligator*, n.d. Oil on wood.









56. *Landscape with Two Pink Carnations in a Glass Goblet*, 1983. Oil on wood.

## PITCH NOTES FOR *ALBERT YORK*

*Bruce Hainley*

1.

So much contingency on such a small scale, many paintings by Albert York are *of flowers*, cut and usually arranged in various containers (canned tomato and coffee tins, crockery, simple glassware), situated on not infrequently indeterminate surfaces. While, early on, these stark floral works, “ingratiating” Calvin Tomkins wagered, could be seen to partake of the tradition of still life, a mode of painting already categorically complicated, no matter how adored, York found, through years of elegantly awkward investigation, his way to works that balked at hoary conceptual confines: his “flowers,” his “still lifes,” engaging the torque of other genres (portrait, self portrait, and, certainly, landscape), eventually achieve, by methods akin to grafting or hybridization, something utterly *sui generis*, murmuringly fantastic, e.g. *Three Red Tulips in a Landscape with Horse and Rider* (1982) [plate 4] and *Landscape with Two Pink Carnations in a Glass Goblet* (1983).

2.

For whom have all his flowers been arranged and for what purpose? Courtship? Mourning? Hospitality? Anniversary? Delight?

3.

The geometry of almost all of York’s oil-painting supports — wood panel, tin, plywood, Masonite, canvas mounted on wood, canvas, canvas or paper mounted on Masonite — is square or squarish, his hothouse subjects almost always centered and, one wishes to state, definitively, grounded, although how different things hold their ground is one of his major concerns or pursuits.

4.

By “different things,” I mean figuration appearing as cows, humans, birds, trees, dogs, snakes, as well as — possibly — a haunting or apparition of these things, each coordinating a seemingly specific gravity; by “holding their ground,” I mean the insistence of things to exist or secure existence *in sunlight* versus *in moonlight* as well as, to qualify, *sunlight/moonlight in the world* versus *in one’s mind*.

5.

Cf. Matisse’s *Pansies* (c. 1903) (*What supports that table, if it is a table? How does the delicacy of petal register as different from but related to deftly Delft-y silk fabric or fine wallpaper?*).





Henri Matisse. *Pansies*, c. 1903. Oil on paper mounted on wood.  
 19¼ x 17¾ inches; 49 x 45 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.  
 Bequest of Joan Whitney Payson, 1975.

6.

Over four decades, the quality of light in York's painting, not unlike the quality of his hues, shifts from dark to bright, shade to tint.

7.

Moonlight, especially pre-dawn glow, takes on the value of Wedgwood, but, however powdery, a non-matte Wedgwood, shining, shiny. (Extra turp in the mix?)

8.

His conception of the picture plane is not a window. Needless to say, it doesn't exactly accord with a flatbed either, and yet... "The picture conceived as the image of an image," Leo Steinberg wrote, after delineating the "criterion of classification" that his flatbed picture plane cut across ("abstract" and "representational," Pop and Modernist"). Steinberg's magisterial essay "Other Criteria" still presents some of the most dexterous theorization of painting made by anyone from York's generation (York was born in 1928, the same year as Andy Warhol; Steinberg was born in 1920); it's "a conception which guarantees that the presentation will not be directly that of a worldspace, and that it will nevertheless admit any experience as



the matter of representation.” For York, history, dreams, shifts of mood, the memories of artworks seen long ago or longingly, ruthlessly studied in the pages of a book, remain *experiences* as much as Long Island summer heat and humidity or the live pong of wet dog, shaking itself off to dry.

9.

Certain personages in the paintings are referred to as “Indians,” not Native Americans, not Shinnecocks, not Narragansetts, not Timucuas or Seminoles. Not the Indigenous. The birds in his paintings are called “bird,” the dogs are called “dog,” the trees “tree,” the cows “cow.” Flowers, some of them, escape, barely, this sparring and spare neutrality: buttercups, anemones, roses, dandelions. It would be convenient to consider these rough-hewn nouns — scrubbed of any convenient but misguided Linnaean taxonomy or long-standing patois — an example of his search for the feral quintessence of things in the world around him; but however terse or scraped-down all the nomenclature stabilizing York’s images might be, it arrives courtesy of Roy Davis, his longtime dealer. The painter hove pictures back to languagelessness, certainly never calling any of his works (no matter how apposite) *Study of the Real Looked at in Paint and Wood*, not even encumbering them with a title such as *Untitled*, and he would have them remain there.

10.

In *Four Dogs* (1977) [plate 57], three canines play attack with a fourth. They have an aggressive Roman quality and could be fighting over a bone tossed to them by Caesar. Awful but cheerful relations occur too in the contest between paint and not-paint. For all his passionate use of the viscous tactility of paint (slippery, scraped), York is painfully attuned to everything that can be represented only by its refusal to be painted — the edges where being comes undone. (To clarify that observation by claiming that this is how the painting and its process might reveal the strains of existence both pacifies and gussies up the dailiness of such a struggle in the studio.) Despite an air of American vernacular, there is a Frenchness (Cézannesqueness?) to this tension. In his final, posthumously published novel, *Prisoner of Love* (1986), Jean Genet got at a similar representational impasse when he wrote that “the space between the words contains more reality than does the time it takes to read them.” One cloud glows above the creatures in full, late-afternoon radiance, the other goes flat, almost matte, disappearing. The energy of the dogs’ muscles tensed, attacking, attacked, in dove gray, cocoa, mud, peaked by one merely in jabbed outline, reduced to nothing but ferocity, its skin that of the paper mounted on a support.

11.

Many invoke Albert Pinkham Ryder in relation to York. Why not? In the lone extensive profile of the artist, published by *The New Yorker* in 1995 [in this volume, page 15], Calvin Tomkins quotes York about Ryder, the only lengthy comment in print by York about any other painter who, as Tomkins put it, “made a profound impression on him.” Which should not be taken as proof that York had nothing else to say

(perhaps he did, perhaps not), at least in words, about other artists. Nevertheless, no other stated impression, profound or not, so conveniently fit a ready narrative for the “kind of painter” York is considered to be. Tomkins: “He remembers seeing at the Metropolitan a temporary installation of paintings by Ryder, Eastman Johnson, Winslow Homer, and several other Americans. ‘The Ryders were the only ones that held up, for me,’ he said. ‘They were so small, but so strong that they outdid everything else in the room. The whole universe was there in those small pictures. Ryder knew how to fit together the negative and positive forms — clouds, sky, trees, the sea. He locked it all in.’” What I mean to point out about the Ryder quotation is, well, to let it be a caution about what gets recorded, since it is often very different from the whole story or something like the truth. E.g. last night I saw Michael Clark perform (amazing, truly; the first dance was to Scritti Politti’s “The Boom Boom Bap”), and it happened that my chair (most of the audience stood or crouched on the floor) was wedged up next to Barbara Kruger’s; I don’t really know Barbara Kruger very well, and there’s no reason she should remember that we’ve met several times. Not a word, perhaps not even so much as a glance, was exchanged between us, and yet some list of who was at the event would register that we both were, and yet, despite practically sitting in her lap, our proximity meant absolutely nada. Which is a wandering way of asking: Ryderesque, is that the kind of painter York is? What kind of painter is that, a century or so after Ryder’s demise? What did York say about painters, painting, to Tomkins or someone else, that didn’t end up making it into any article?

12.

I was going to write about Lauren Bacall and Jackie O. owning Yorks; didn’t; about taking, gently, off the wall, as permitted, as, even, encouraged, York’s portrait of his wife [chronology fig. 9] — wearing a black fur coat, perhaps astrakhan, not yet having slipped on her right, nude evening glove, which she holds in her other, gloved hand, she stands, waiting, in a room seafoam green, so tender, marzipan, her décolletage, the look on her face distracted from everything around her by recalling something recently lost track of, her head, in profile, turned in the same direction as a painting that hangs in the background, just off her right shoulder, a painting, if it’s not a window or a picture of a view out a window (his quick shifts of scale mind-boggle), larger than any painting York ever finished — and instantly, the frame, busted in my hands, fell apart, puzzle pieces tumbling to the floor, scrabbled, the painting itself landing right-side up; mortified, didn’t.

13.

With a so-called grain of salt, is that, then, how to take many of the aperçus delivered about York by Tomkins in his *New Yorker* profile? For instance: “Contemporary art barely registered on York’s aesthetic compass. He knew that Abstract Expressionism had become the dominant influence both here and abroad, and he also knew that it had nothing to do with him. ‘It was a different world,’ he said. ‘Naturally, it froze you — made you think, What are you doing with your tiny panels?’” Can something



57. *Four Dogs*, 1977. Oil on paper mounted on Masonite.





Gwen John. *Cat Studies*, n.d. Watercolor and pencil on paper.  
6¼ x 8⅞ inches; 17 x 22 cm. National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.

that “froze you” and “made you think” be said to “barely register”? York’s response to “contemporary art” or “Abstract Expressionism,” his self-questioning about what he was doing, appears no less deliberate or striking than that of Alice Neel or Milton Avery, Fairfield Porter or Jane Freilicher, Maureen Gallace or Brian Calvin, in terms of vitiating certain received ideas of the “abstract” or “representational.” About what York was doing with his tiny panels, Tomkins might have inquired, Did you see any of Forrest Bess’s six solo shows at Betty Parsons, from 1949 to 1967? Or, given Roy Davis’s championing of Gwen John since the mid-1960s, the fact of Cecily Langdale’s writing John’s catalogue raisonn  , Did you confront what she’d done? But, it appears, Tomkins didn’t.

14.

“As to whether I have anything worth expressing, that is apart from the question,” Gwen John wrote, in 1912, to her lifelong friend Ursula Tyrwhitt, “I may never have anything to express, except this desire for a more interior life.”

15.

Recall the quiet aberrancies of another York predecessor and his disregard for hackneyed notions about not only how the “abstract” and “representational” looked but also about how “importance” was too often sized up: the first solo exhibition by



Giorgio Morandi, *Flowers*, 1952. Oil on canvas. 18 x 18 inches; 45.5 x 45.5 cm.  
Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, Rovereto  
Trento, Italy. Augusto and Francesca Giovanardi Collection.

Giorgio Morandi in New York City occurred in 1955, at the Delius Gallery; two years later, art historian and critic Lionello Venturi (he also produced the first catalogue raisonné of Cézanne) curated a Morandi exhibition of thirty-five paintings, two watercolors, ten drawings, and thirteen etchings for the World House Galleries in Manhattan — for whatever it’s worth, not that much more extensive than the size of the exhibition that occasions the catalogue you have in your hands.

16.

There is the still life *Geranium in Blue Pot with Fallen Leaf and Bird* (1982) [plate 58], and there is, I guess, somewhere in life (or in life remembered) an actual geranium and blue clay pot and tender bird, things that almost anyone has seen at one time or another. But what York questions in his depictions via limited, basic materials (oils, thinner, brushes, palette knife, various supports) is not quite exactly what he’s seen. He is questioning rather the act of looking — a perfectly useless activity — and looking again and how recording it, this looking, no matter what, changes it, the “subject” becoming paint and the surface to which it is applied, with neither taking precedence over the observant looking but also not simply subservient to it, so that what results from the rendezvous might be called “Painted Geranium Painted in a Painted Blue Pot Painted with Painted Fallen Leaf and Painted Bird.”





58. *Geranium in Blue Pot with Fallen Leaf and Bird*, 1982. Oil on wood.



17.

A writer was asked whether she didn't worry that her not being interested in certain things, including her own thoughts, might not be dangerous, since didn't writers write because they had big thoughts. When he heard this interview broadcast on the morning radio he trusted that the reporter asking the question had never written anything in her life. Later, after searching for a word that would correspond to writing in the way illegibility did to reading, failing to find one, needing it, needing it now especially, he considered the reporter's assumption about the relative size of thoughts, bigger and smaller. What size was it? Confusing because he worried about thoughts constantly, yet the question was never, big or small, but, any or none at all. Moreover, he couldn't explain why he felt the frequent urge to transpose his so-called thinking into the third person.

18.

I wanted for whatever I wrote not to be contrived or clever. Fairfield Porter concluded that no "part of the strong emotional appeal of these paintings is that [York] is not clever." At the start of his acute observations on the artist for a 1975 Davis & Long catalogue [in this volume, page 29], Porter confronted a discontent that resonates with ours or, at least, the experience of many today, but in how he considers art to function a key difference is marked. "Our present day widespread discontent seems to be caused by the feeling that nothing any longer is worth while," Porter reckons. "Why do we feel this?" He "guesses" that it is because a skewed, scientific objectivity, precluding "value and emotional involvement," leaves only "quantity." If it weren't condescending to an analysis that merits no condescension, I'd say it's almost quaint, such a worry over any scientism in the face of current immiseration, and yet how stupefying, the craven difference between the popularity he notes ("The popularity of art today is a reaction against our disillusionment with an objectivity whose purposes are not ours") and now.

19.

Where are we when, under the guise of art and/or aesthetics, a financial objectivity whose purposes are not ours masquerades as what makes art worthwhile?

20.

E.g. "Suddenly, that painting became as important as a de Kooning. We're talking about the same price range." It no longer matters exactly which fairly recent painting at auction became — suddenly — as important as a de Kooning, but in terms of summing up the zeitgeist's mood and mode of rancid decontextualization, it doesn't get any... richer than, courtesy of two sentences from a *New York Times* profile of a hyphenation ("curator-auctioneer"), the — would it be large or small? — thought that a painting's importance, hell, that importance *tout court* should be gauged or determined by, needless to say, reduced to, "price range." Meaning, not to mention meaningfulness (LOL), long ago jettisoned.

21.

Suddenly, *this* became as important as *that*. Price-rangewise.

22.

Suddenly, raping those underage triplets, burying them alive, became as important as, what, a Pollock?

23.

Of course, I believe that York's paintings alleviate or, perhaps, counter, if only for a minute or the slow-motion length of a shudder, the grimness of the current situation, call it aesthetics of or as its bankability, even if they weren't made for any such apotropaic reasons. I find it, well, yes, as *important* to reflect upon what it means for York to be given a fancy, guest-curated survey at this moment as I do to state that encountering one of his paintings, no matter how incommensurable, can instantly void so much of the noisy bravado and slack-jawed ersatzness overwhelming almost everything under the sign of "art." Maybe Porter's thought about quantity, taken price-rangewise, remains, incredibly, apposite.

24.

Everyone supposedly knows the consequences and cautions of expecting too much of art, the olde-tyme exuberant or resigned claims that it became or was made into a stand-in for religion, but what are the consequences of expecting or asking too little of it?

25.

York's abstention from the themes imposed upon him by the ideology of the day, his indifference to so many standard operating procedures, includes a dismissal or refusal of: publicity, a sanctioned rate of production, accreditation; discussions with curators; worth being determined by a work's size; hackneyed pieties about how innovation supposedly looks or why that sort of innovation matters; concern for anything other than a personal pursuit of lyric intensity while negotiating a point-blank confrontation with history — all in stealth relation to the leopard-alive instant at the end of the brush.

26.

His relentless dissatisfaction with his own work. "When I [Tomkins] asked what it was about his work that he found so inadequate, he mentioned scale and color — he would like his paintings to be larger and more colorful. 'I'm a black-and-white painter,' [York] said. Black and white? 'Well, light blue and dark green. Raphael Soyer tried to get me out of it. There are no reds in there, no oranges, no complement to the blues. I looked at the catalogue of a Seurat show a few years ago. Wonderful painter, marvelous with color. His little panels vibrate, they come to life. You look at one of my things and it's really dead.'"

27.

York grew up believing that his mother was dead. She wasn't, and around the time of his father's death there was a reconciliation of some kind with her, and, having made a lively income from real estate, she eventually left her son a small inheritance that allowed him to tamper with stupid notions of how much work, or the rate at which, any artist should produce. That first sentence is actually a direct quotation from Tomkins ("York grew up believing that his mother was dead"). I want to join it to yet another quotation, calling particular attention to the way in which York describes his studio: "York conceded that he had been doing a lot of scraping down lately. He also gave me the impression that he worked every day. 'I work in the basement right now, in the underworld,' he said. 'I get the early-morning sunlight through a couple of basement windows. I'm an early riser — up at 4:30 or 5:00 A.M. I get my *New York Times* in Southampton — you can get it early at the 7-Eleven. I take a look at the world and have a cup of coffee, and then I get to work.'" If an artist experiences *the return of the dead* and describes his studio as *in the underworld*, what kind of work does that compel him to make?

28.

His figures' quality of sleepwalking, of partygoers playing statues.

29.

Genet, from "The Workshop of Alberto Giacometti" (1958): "No, no, the work of art is not destined for unborn generations. It is offered to the innumerable populace of the dead. Who recognize it. Or refuse it. But these dead of whom I spoke have never been alive. Or I am forgetting. They were alive enough to be forgotten, enough so that their life's function was to make them cross to that calm shore where they wait for a sign — one that comes from here — that they recognize."

30.

Of course, I'm freaking out in having to wonder, is such a way of working, given the power of the ideological superstructures of this day, is such indifference, such relentless self-dissatisfaction, any longer possible?

31.

"For thought," Artaud clarifies in "Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society" (1947), "is a luxury of peace."

32.

And without peace there is no thought and without thought there is no luxury.

33.

Is this a time of peace or is it a time of immiseration? Is one always imbricated by the other?



34.

“Those blocks were made of fire and there’s still fire in them,” Cézanne was said to have exclaimed about Mont Sainte-Victoire, after years and years of trying to paint it. He didn’t state, “*Mont Sainte-Victoire, c’est moi.*” It wouldn’t be the same thing. *Ce n’est pas la même chose.* In the film *Cézanne: dialogue avec Joachim Gasquet* (1989), Danièle Huillet’s voice declaims Joachim Gasquet’s recollection of Cézanne’s words: “*Ces roc étaient du feu. Il y a du feu encore en eux.*”

35.

This text on York, I so wanted to base it on, as a way of paying homage to, Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub’s *Cézanne*. What is the size of that thought? Would it be too contrived? No documentary or biopic, *Cézanne* is all ferocity, stark sections of thinking, conveyed in, as critic Sally Shafto stated, “a mere ten works by the artist, with only one in the first half an hour and, aside from three lateral tracking shots, no camera movement. All the paintings are carefully shown with their frames. [...] Even the voice-over is unusual: read by Danièle Huillet, it frequently does not observe the punctuation of the original text, and breaks and pauses occur in unexpected places.” The opening tracking shots approach various vantages on Mont Sainte-Victoire through a park and cityscape, to the sound of traffic and wind.

36.

And yet with their blocks of fire (lights! camera! action!), they distill something like an eau de Cézanne, crystalline, smelling of Aix-en-Provence pine, marble, oils and turpentine, any sip burning. Other than the ten works by Cézanne and the opening tracking shots, we see only a few black and white photos of the artist at work *en plein air*, a long sequence from Jean Renoir’s 1934 film *Madame Bovary* (not only because of the filmmaker’s father but also because he cast and costumed some mysterious doppelgänger of Cézanne’s *Old Woman with a Rosary* to win a prize for her more than half century of service on the same farm at Les Comices Agricoles, Juillet 1841, the scene during which, while the locals celebrate agricultural labor, Rodolphe steals Emma away to the empty town hall, to watch the events from a window and to confess his love to her, a scene that, in the novel as well as in the movie, matter-of-factly sets up the undoing of just about everyone in Flaubert’s narrative), two brief sequences from Huillet/Straub’s *Der Tod des Empedokles* (1987), and a final, long closing shot of the gates to one of Cézanne’s last studios in Paris, on rue Hégésippe Moreau.

37.

Huillet’s offscreen voice in the film enunciates the unusual thinking about looking of a stern taskmaster, Cézanne in the period of some of his most radical innovations. Materialists, Huillet/Straub test the material remains of one of the first modernist materialists.

38.

In a 1975 interview with Robert Schoen, after acknowledging an acute statement of Gilles Deleuze in relation to their films — “Art is resistance against communication” — Jean-Marie Straub went on to comment, “I think this is true — at least as a provocation, if not more... We knew exactly that our films, each of them, was a little war machine against Esperanto.”

39.

Straub was arguing for a local specificity, something *untranslatable* — the distant marble odor of Sainte-Victoire — perhaps untranslatable into any *language* whatsoever.

40.

What was York doing with his tiny panels? He was constructing something like little war machines against Esperanto.

41.

*Albert York* the film, what would it show? Only ten Yorks, perhaps, a few juxtaposed, filmed two at a time.

*Landscape with Sleeping Figure* (c. 1968) [page 146]

*Two Reclining Women in a Landscape* (c. 1967) [plate 60]

*Seated Male Nude* (c. 1968) [plate 61] + *Portrait of Cecily* (1971) [page 153]

*Woman and Dog in Moonlit Landscape* (1977) + *Four Dogs* (1977) [plate 57]

*Indian Brave and Indian Chief* (1978) [plate 59]

*Three Red Tulips in a Landscape with Horse and Rider* (1982) [plate 4]

*Cow and Woman in Landscape* (1986)

*Landscape with Two Pink Carnations in a Glass Goblet* (1983) [plate 56]

42.

Open with three lateral tracking shots of East Hampton summer greenery — vetch, trees, fields; a lake; the ocean in the far, far distance; sea grasses to sync sound of the landscape, breeze, traffic, local, seasonal to-and-fro.

43.

Cut to still shots of Polaroids: two of York, in 1979, standing near a window, sunlight hitting his left shoulder [chronology fig. 13]; then the exterior of his house, unremarkable, “one would not have known,” according to his dealer, “that an artist lived there.”

44.

Instead of clips from films, there would be two excerpted sequences of James Schuyler reading (at the San Francisco Art Institute, February 10, 1989) two poems: “Horse-Chestnut Trees and Roses” from 1987 (“...Golden Wings (a patented rose — / did you know you can patent roses? Well, you can); / prickly, purplish Rose de Rescht...”), when it still included the last line “Odious hateful vandal,” which I heard him read at



59. *Indian Brave and Indian Chief*, 1978. Oil on Masonite.



the 92nd Street Y, a line, its hateful, vandal absence in every subsequent printing after its appearance in *The New Yorker*, I always miss, and “Haze” from 1989.

45.

I admire Huillet/Straub’s direct, no-nonsense proposal that there’s nothing not relevant to today, to the moment, no matter how immiserated, about a presentation of a selection of ten paintings by Cézanne on film, with Huillet’s voice or silence. In terms of any person recording York discussing his own work, in his basement underworld or strolling, purposefully, around his yard, or, say, walking through the Met and talking about what fired him up, as of yet no equivalent of Gasquet — who published his memoir and recollections of long afternoon conversations with Cézanne, in the countryside and following visits to the Louvre, as *Cézanne*, in 1921, fifteen years after the staunch contrarian’s death, when much of the information Gasquet recounted had already circulated in publications by others — has elbowed his or her way onto the scene.

46.

From Pedro Costa’s 2001 film about Huillet/Straub, *Onde Jaz o Teu Sorriso?*:

JMS: [*breaking into a worker’s song in German — and then dropping it*] You cannot expect form before the idea...

DH: ...for together they’ll make their appearance.

JMS: Things don’t exist until they have found a rhythm, a form. [*DH winds film through the editing bay.*] The form of the body gives birth to the soul. I’ve said it a thousand times... When someone says: “Yes, the form, it’s the form, the form, never mind the idea.” That is a sell-out. It’s not true. You have to see things clearly: First there is the idea. Then there is the matter and then the form. And there is nothing you can do about that. Nobody can change that! The idea, that’s what Eisenstein had when he organized his sequences. He had his montage of attractions... Then there is the matter. He has to determine the duration of the shots he has strung together, that is the matter. What we are doing here is the idea that was on paper, the construction of the film, and that is working on the matter. We work with a matter that resists us and you just can’t cut anywhere you like between shots. I already explained that before coming into this joint. [*JMS at the side of the editing bay, framed in silhouette by an open door.*] And through this work, the struggle between the idea and the matter, and the struggle with the matter, gives rise to the form... [*JMS walks out to the open corridor, lights his cigar, entering to kick the wedge holding the door open.*] The same goes for a sculptor. [*He bends down to pick up some bit of stuff.*] He has his idea and gets a block of marble and he works the matter. He has to take into account the nervures in the marble, the cracks, all the geological layers in it. He just can’t do whatever he wants. My blood boils when



*Landscape with Sleeping Figure*, c. 1968. Oil on canvas.  
13 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 12 $\frac{7}{8}$  inches; 35 x 33 cm. Private collection.

I hear things like that... That the idea doesn't exist because there is a form. But where does that form come from? If it hasn't been worked, if it hasn't come out of the matter, there is no form, it's formless. In the beginning the Earth was without form. [*He leans over the wall, walks back, outside the editing room.*] Your formless form, your infamous form, formless, infamous, invertebrate. If you are working with nuance, condensation, expansion, deflagration, you cannot say that it's all in the whole, that it's all one. Those are people who no longer have morals, can no longer feel emotions, neither restrained nor violent.

DH: Are you done? Have you calmed down?

JMS: I am always calm.

47.

While having the camera hold on each of ten Yorks, I did wish at certain points to cut to paintings by other artists, to probe for their correspondence and in what way that correspondence alters, inarguably but not necessarily straightforwardly, how anyone might think about York's work, and, perhaps, York himself. Fixating on the quotidian subject matter, many still mistake Yorks for pretty intimist landscapes, still lifes, instead of the mute fighting machines they are.



Édouard Manet. *Fishing*, c. 1862–63. Oil on canvas. 30¼ x 48½ inches; 77 x 123 cm.  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. Richard J. Bernhard Gift, 1957.

48.

In relation to *Landscape with Sleeping Figure* (c. 1968), I was going to invoke Manet's *Fishing* (c. 1862–63), an oddball, strutting thing, in which the brash up-and-comer stretches and flexes, relishing the sheer historical presumption of what he's entered into, a young gun besting Delacroix's exhortation for him to "look at Rubens, draw inspiration from Rubens, copy Rubens," because "Rubens was God." Such thrill in the medium's possibilities, how they allow Manet to come into his own, to test out painting's planar theatrics, to audition for the life he desires, quivers in the dramatic clouds and shadows, the river idyll's mesmerizing blues and greens, the various fishermen, professional and amateur, some spotlit, transmigrated, in beams of sunlight. Meanwhile the artist and his future wife, Suzanne Leenhoff, are decked out in Flemish, Rubenesque costume, their regal canine heeling, and take in the fantasy they're a part of. While York depicted, at times on the backs of some of his panels, an artist and wife-muse, to glean the quintessential poetics of *Landscape with Sleeping Figure* in relation to York's pursuits, imagine him, instead of gulping a draught of agonistic brew, prioritizing the potential of the canvas as a psychic territory. Is *Landscape with Sleeping Figure* a picture of a person asleep, perhaps dreaming, in a country half-borrowed from Poussin (the S of the river, sweeping slowly through the sylvan scene) or the entirety of a dream of all that? Naked in the wild, the sleeping body has no definitive gender — how are we, if we are, gendered



in dreamtime, in paint? — his and/or her torso hidden by a throw of dark moss. Merging into and turning out of each other, the landscape and the figure unite, as in so many myths in which mortals, to stay forever together or to escape godly ravishment, metamorphose or are by some local god changed into trees, rushing water; any elemental matter is preferable to self-conscious, vulnerable flesh. York puts many different perspectival scales and chroma to work at once, as if to ask, how does the human figment or pigment fit into the vegetable economy of greens, before shifting to foggy notions in the mauves beyond?

49.

But then that quotation of Delacroix makes me wonder: given such a relay race of inspiration — in commending Rubens to Manet, Delacroix clarifies his own indebtedness and aesthetic lineage as much as he deftly deflects attention away from his own work — where are we now in terms of beholdenness, which is to say, in terms of fishing for the big catch, is it any longer knowledge or aesthetic godhead?

50.

York's urbane negotiation of his own belatedness; ours.

51.

The real, as if you any longer care a damn, includes everything, conscious life plus what roils in the unconscious. Whatever interest York had in the actual, he tested the realness of paint, the realness of vision (or, more quietly but no less accurately, looking), how the real is or is not distinct from memory or representation through a patient consideration of factuality's reliance on fiction. In his work, it is as if past, present, and future were all visible, which partly explains the future playing dress-up with the past, women and men in nineteenth-century garb, Native Americans in full feather or loincloth, a man in armor fighting a crocodile. The human, whatever remains of it, exists with a treelike solidity or fades to ghostly outlines; both solid and phantasmal, its figures somehow never seem to be as fully present as the flowers, dogs, or cows — perhaps due to some mortal doubt or to the fact that it is difficult, a difficulty that can prove merciless as it is wonderful, to exist in many times at once, which is many spaces at once — exactly the space-time compelled in some of the most fascinating paintings by York.

52.

All of which is to say that York wouldn't need to dote on Duchamp's notion of *multiplication virtuelle* (the wily chess player formulated its dynamics in a letter to *les sœurs Stettheimer*) to account for his presenting, instead of classical perspective, different temporal events occurring within the same pictorial zone. Any knowledge of Giorgione's *The Tempest* (c. 1507–10), would invite dwelling on one of the stranger inceptions of landscape genre while pondering how painting can be used to fold time, or to demonstrate time's folding or foldedness, since Giorgione (in some



Giorgione. *The Tempest*, c. 1507–10. Oil on canvas.  
32¼ x 28¾ inches; 82 x 73 cm. Accademia, Venice.

of the most prepossessing interpretations) has the dragon slayer looking across the green world to encounter his baby-self nursing on his mother's tit. Again and again in York, looking becomes seeing through time, seeing many times at once. Take, for example, *Three Tulips in a Landscape with a Horse and Rider* [plate 4]. The rider and his beast galloping in the supposed "distance," behind or in the background of convulsive red tulips (blossoms that would have made Le Douanier Rousseau proud), don't only bolt in from Albert Pinkham Ryder's *The Race Track (Death on a Pale Horse)* (1895–1910), they recall a Paul Revere-like warning as much as they become one, however indeterminate, for "our" time. *Indian Brave and Indian Chief* [plate 59] depicts a reckoning as much as a history. The two sirs have been bearing witness and are as present as the land they stand on and sky they stand under; no question of restitution, but recognition of an ongoing irreconcilability, what is happening, what happened.

53.

How does anyone know that during the time he and his wife "lived separately" — when York, as Tomkins again has it, "rented houses in the East Hampton area and, for a few months, outside Narragansett, Rhode Island," a period in which he had his year or so of bursting productivity, 1982, *mirabilis* (is that how it should be put?), when, it is claimed, he resided and painted "with only a dog for company" — that



Gustave Courbet. *Young Ladies on the Banks of the Seine*. 1856–57. Oil on canvas.  
68½ x 81¼ inches; 174 x 206 cm. Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts  
de la Ville de Paris, Paris. Gift of Etienne Baudry via Juliette Courbet, 1906.

he wasn't going out, after a wild day in the studio, carousing, in a Cheeveresque manner, reckless, drunk? The life of the single person is, to a certain degree, if not ahistorical, at least antihistorical, made up by daily events traceable by nobody other than the one, practically anonymous, living it. The soul selects her own society, and after just about as much of that as she can bear, pours herself a stiff one, then another.

54.

Rather than the louche languor of Courbet's *Young Ladies on the Bank of the Seine* (1856–57), in *Two Reclining Women in a Landscape*, York presents femininity on a work break. Delighting in their respite of girl talk and plan-making, one barefoot, her back turned toward us, her mood to be determined only by her leisurely body language and the attention she directs to her girlfriend, the other, gamine in flats as green as grass, tries out the look of a rose behind her ear, unselfconsciously. It is a study of whiling away. The women, lovely, daring, have such specific personalities; if they're not precisely portraits it feels like they should be. (Cf. Whit Stillman's movie *Damsels in Distress*.) York often occluded specifics about the face in his later paintings, but it wasn't as if, until the end, he couldn't still exact his own features or those of a cat or dog, with a few wise, spry moves of charcoal.





60. *Two Reclining Women in a Landscape*, c. 1967. Oil on canvas.





61. *Seated Male Nude*, c. 1968. Oil on wood.



*Portrait of Cecily*, c. 1971. Oil on board. 12 x 11 ¼ inches;  
31 x 29 cm. Private collection.

55.

The drama of Shakespeare's green world "assimilated," as Lauren Bacall (or was it Northrop Frye? Whoever starred in that stern melodrama *Anatomy of Criticism*) wrote, "the triumph of life and love over the wasteland," a zone of the imaginary in which "the dream world collides with the stumbling and blinded follies of the world of experience." Difficult to return to the green world, stumbling blinded, in the muck of the wasteland. Why do these days feel so much like a wasteland? Difficult, often now, to enjoy "follies." Trying to come to terms with as well as to find terms for the mood of York's paintings and analogies for his worldspace, I keep returning to the songs of Harold Arlen, Cole Porter, Dorothy Fields, Jerome Kern, Rodgers and Hart — hell, call it what it is — to the melodies of the Great American Songbook, as well as the bittersweet yet dashing command of so many of its greatest interpreters, and, yes, I mean Ella and Judy, Sarah and Peggy, but also Anita O'Day and Cleo Laine. Ditching any merely nostalgic groove, so much of that sly, counterfactual romantic energy is picked up when you hear the Velvet Underground perform "Sunday Morning" and "Candy Says," "I'm Set Free" and "Pale Blue Eyes," and even "Foggy Notion," the heartbreaking tension in Lou Reed's voice, even its venom. By admitting all of that, certainly, I also mean the Bemelmans Bar and the Bobby Short of it. The Nina Simone of it. The bridge or pinochle party of it. The Jackie O. and Grey Gardens of it. "Damask troubles," as Frederick Seidel coolly discerned at the start of *My Tokyo*. The *Sleepless Nights* of it. *The Lady Eve* and *Ishtar* of it.



56.

Sir Andrew Aguecheek, in *Twelfth Night*, when he confesses, “I was adored once too.”

57.

Somewhere over the rainbow.

58.

In other words, a concept of luxury almost extinct.

59.

Jean-Marie Straub: “And our luxury [...] what you say is that we have nothing to lose. I’m not in this for the career, never have been, even at my age, even if I have tried to make a career out of it. I don’t do that anymore, so I can allow myself the luxury of doing things no one else would do.”

60.

In *Cow and Woman in a Landscape*, the freshet of water hiding in the lower left corner is not a piece of sky, fallen to the ground, although the wet might reflect sky. Cow and woman, are they present to one another? Do they exist in the same dimension? How? Why, when the artist has painted the cow so solidly, bovine mass and smooth, stiff, warm pelt, does the landscape seep through the woman’s attire, into or almost becoming her entire being? Is she some quiet retort or response, in terms of handling, in terms of idea and its form, to the sleeping figure York painted long before? Outlines, if that’s what to call them, don’t convey haste or even spontaneity, nothing “unfinished,” but, rather, something struggling to be seen or maintained in relation to the concreteness of the world around it, that is not it and yet for what it prepares.

61.

Difficult to return to the green world. An eclogue about that fact.

62.

About *Seated Male Nude* [plate 61] and *Portrait of Cecily* [page 153], I would, in a diminished moment, hang them next to one another and have the camera hold on the pair, staring, uselessly, and the silence of their melancholy music and room tone be the only sound.

63.

*Haze*

hangs heavy  
down into trees: dawn  
doesn’t break today,  
the morning

seeps into being, one  
 bird, maybe  
 two, chipping  
 away at it. A white dahlia,  
 big  
 as Baby Bumstead's head,  
 leans  
 its folded petals  
 at a window, a lesson  
 in origami.  
 Frantically, God  
 knows what  
 machine: oh, no,  
 just Maggio's  
 garbage truck.  
 Staring  
 at all the roughage  
 that hides an estuary,  
 such urbanity  
 seems inapt: the endless city  
 builds on and on  
 thinning out, here and there,  
 for the wet green velvet towels  
 ("slight imperfections")  
 of summer  
 ("moderately priced")  
 and a hazy morning  
 in August,  
 even that  
 we may grow to love.

—James Schuyler, 1989

64.

*Landscape with Two Pink Carnations in a Glass Goblet* [plate 56]

The viewpoint on the carnations, strangely (based on a true story?), looks slightly up from below. Simply arranged (by whom?), ready for their close-up, on what seems to be a lawn, perhaps closely cropped for croquet, the waiting boutonnières in their fancy glass hold the scene in place, incarnated of every hue that surrounds them. The grass's greens darken, shifting into untendedness, on the right, before things go truly unruly, more vertical and thick, a little shimmer of slate blue, "overgrown" (painted over) by verdant blades. Just beyond the markings making up the border of sea grasses and bush trees, the ocean, almost hidden, pokes in at



René Magritte. *The Tomb of the Wrestlers*, 1960. Oil on canvas.  
35 x 45 <sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches; 89 x 116 cm. Private collection.

two points, moments, in different bluer blues than the sky's glassy-glarey, marine-reflective haze. Is there any water in the goblet, or is the air so thick that no water would be needed? The brushwork of the carnations, jabs, brief strokes, dabs, turns the traces of facture into floral frilliness, toothed petals. How, yes, lovely are the precise darker greens of the pedicel, receptacle, and sepal, and resolute in their precision. Lovely is not a quality anyone should too easily abandon as "uncritical," much less unimportant, not unlike abandon itself. Note the nosegay's frisson of pink peppercorn, sneeziness, clove, concision, Magritte (cf. *The Cut-Glass Bath*, 1946; *The Tomb of the Wrestlers*, 1960).

Don't you recognize the vantage, so like the one from which Watteau depicted his Pierrot? "Difficult to determine" or "far from clear," whether his melancholy figure is a portrait "taken from life" or an allegory "drawn from the artist's imagination" (as someone writing wall labels for the Louvre claims). The painting, if it is Watteau's self portrait, perhaps determines a state of being between the two — imagination and its allegory, life. (Perhaps that should be the other way around?) Between the acts. Gilles, as he used to be called before authorities reduced him to a type, or Jean-Antoine as it could be, clown and/or artist, holds his somber (?) ground, immobilized (stage fright?), an understudy for anomie or mixed feelings much more immediate, contemporary. Many of York's women and men, posed in costumes (broad-brimmed hats and post-corset shifts; natty three-pieces as well as





Jean-Antoine Watteau. *Pierrot, formerly known as Gilles*, c. 1718–19.  
Oil on canvas. 72 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 58 $\frac{7}{8}$  inches; 185 x 150 cm.  
Louvre Museum, Paris. Bequest of Dr. Louis La Caze, 1869.

mufti with wooden scimitar sheathed), audition for the roles of characters from a newfangled Commedia dell'Arte. Community theater summer-stock production players, these carnations painted in oil on wood panel.

Imagine Pierrot, flipped (in a one-handed handstand or upside down in a Rococo art history book?), so that the strawberries-in-cream pink bows (silk?) on his slipper-like, Capezio-esque dance shoes, blossom into dusky frippery, *rose poussière*. *Fête-galante* aspects aren't foreign to York. Put Handel's *Water Music* on the turntable or Sylvester's "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)." In the painting, as much a portrait or self portrait as Watteau's, the artist tropicalizes the sheen and shadow-shimmer of Pierrot's moony costume into a summer luminosity, welcoming, tranquil.

Why shouldn't these paintings (Watteau's, York's) pose something about existence — precarious, vulnerable, then suddenly flamboyant — or, at least, about incarnation? The difficulty of explaining their paradoxical moods prepossesses. Whatever makes them so heartbreaking neither exposes nor hides. Both Gilles and Gillyflowers flaunt their natural artifice, make-believe, "bashfully," daring anyone not to be convinced by their performance.

Almost no one stares out from a York painting, no one looks us right in the eyes or addresses us directly (in many of the later paintings, many faces are occluded, cloudy), and yet if flowers could return our gaze, these Pinks do. Almost no one: the exception, practically proving the rule, is the artist himself, in a series of works on paper, in which he frequently depicts his own face in relation to the heads of dogs and cats at their most undomesticated [plate 1].

The impermanent, the fading and fragile, not just signs for those things, made immemorial and yet also sweetly comic, certainly, but the scale of things remains hard to determine. If the goblin goblet and posy are the size they usually are thought to be on earth, in this dimension or spatiotemporal continuum, what size would anyone have to be to garner such a view of them? York's point — I'm not sure paintings make points, per se — was not to make existence small or mean in relation to things, but somehow perhaps to suggest the intense presence of the material world, the negotiation of it when it suddenly abrades the imaginary. However "constructed," throttled by conflicted and conflicting regimes, "outside," "in," anyone might know the "self" or the "real" to be, how tender is the feeling of attachment to life that refuses to be put into scare quotes ("life"), when something brushes up against us, the hand touching the cheek as it arranges the flower behind the loved one's ear, the cat tightly maneuvering around ankles, these flowers, majestic, indelible, and yet a lark, their scent and nonsense.

You could strive to be Cézanne, Manet, never achieve it, never get there, and yet make something remarkable, enchanting. Important. When I asked Gilles if it was too late to bring up Elizabeth Bishop's "Poem" or Francis Ponge's "*L'œillet*," he just shrugged, sneezed, wiped his silky sleeve across his face, smiled, then blurted, "What does it mean to make a painting, as opposed to something else, something that's not?"





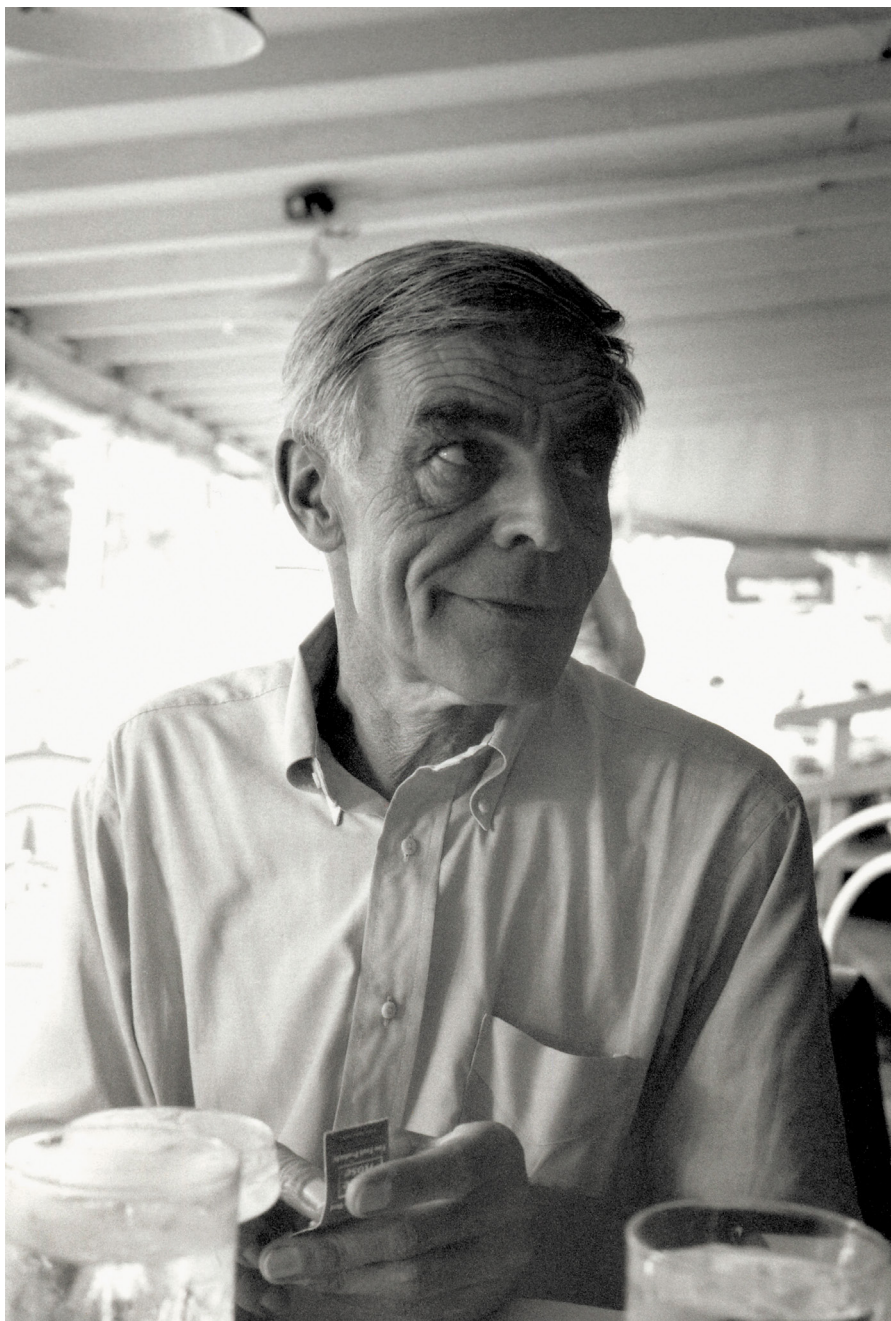


Fig. 1: Albert York in 1989

## CHRONOLOGY

1928

Albert York is born in Detroit, Michigan. His father, Albert York, Sr., was born in London and, at the age of sixteen, immigrated with York's mother to Canada. He served in the Canadian Army during the First World War and then moved his family to Detroit, taking a job as a metal worker in the city's automobile industry.

Soon after Albert York's birth, his unmarried parents separate, and he grows up believing that his mother is dead. Because his father is unable to take care of him, he is placed in a nursery and boarding school near Flint, Michigan, in a town called Fenton, where he spends the first seven years of his life.

According to the poet and essayist William Corbett, author of a small 2010 monograph on the artist, York drew human figures and animals with charcoal as a child. York's father gave him a paintbox and encouraged him to use it, although York later recalls it had the wrong sort of brushes.

1942

York is sent to Belleville, Ontario, to live with his father's sister and her husband. While in high school, he takes painting lessons from a local artist.

1947

York graduates from high school in Belleville. He then studies for one year at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto, where he copies classical sculptures from plaster casts and draws still lifes as part of a traditional first-year curriculum.

In 1948 York transfers to the Society of Arts and Crafts in Detroit and moves back in with his father. He is awarded a scholarship during his second year but only uses part of it before being drafted into the Army in January 1951.

1951–52

York serves in the US Army and sees active duty in the Korean War. During Army Medical Corps training in Seattle, a sergeant from the Bronx tells him about New



Fig. 2: Raphael Soyer. *Self-Portrait*, 1950. Oil on canvas. 24½ x 20½ inches; 62 x 51 cm. National Academy Museum, New York

York's Art Students League. York decides he wants to continue his education there, and after his discharge from the army he moves to New York City.

1953

Lacking the money to pay full tuition, York ends up taking evening painting classes with the social-realist painter Raphael Soyer (1899–1987) at the Art Students League's studios on West 57th street.

Soyer [fig. 2] is York's "most important teacher," as he later tells Calvin Tomkins for a 1995 profile in *The New Yorker*. "I'm a black and white painter. Well, light blue and dark green. Raphael Soyer tried to get me out of it." Soyer, best known today for his female nudes, portraits, and depictions of New York City, joined the WPA Federal Art Project in the 1930s and continues to advocate for representational art throughout his career, strongly opposing the rise of Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s. He founds

*Reality: A Journal of Artist's Writings* around the time York begins studying with him.

In the Spring 1953 issue of *Reality*, Soyer publishes a letter to the director of the Museum of Modern Art, co-authored with fellow artists Isabel Bishop, Edward Hopper, Jack Levine, and Henry Varnum Poor, among others, assailing the institution for privileging abstraction over representational art, a debate that simmers within the art world while York is a student.

Soyer outlines his humanist outlook in the letter, writing "we are acutely aware of the spreading doctrine that non-objectivism has achieved some sort of esthetic finality that precludes all other forms of expression. This belief appears to pervade the schools, the museums, criticism, and as a result has a highly restrictive influence upon young artists. We feel that this particular dogma stems very largely from the Modern Museum and its unquestioned influence throughout the country."

1954–57

York takes on several odd jobs to pay for his room, board, and lessons with Soyer, but after several months is too tired to paint and starts working full time instead. For nearly three years he works a variety of manual jobs, including loading and unloading bolts of cloth in New York's garment district.

In 1957 a friend from Soyer's evening class recommends York for a job as a gilder with Robert Kulicke (1924–2007). Kulicke, an artist who owns a frame shop on York Avenue and East 73rd Street, is one of the best framers in New York and will long be recognized for modernizing the design of picture frames. His streamlined welded-metal frame, first designed for artist friends like Barnett Newman and Clyfford Still, would become ubiquitous in the 1960s.

As Kulicke later recounts to Tomkins, York becomes an adept gilder, though he remains very shy. "I spent hours talking to him in the shop, but I don't recall a single thing he ever said except 'Yes,' 'No,' or 'Maybe.'"

Kulicke, who considers himself primarily a painter, was



discouraged by the rise of Abstract Expressionism, with its emphasis on bold large-scale compositions, and largely gave up painting in the 1940s. The year York starts to work for him, Kulicke receives a commission to frame three hundred paintings by Giorgio Morandi. The Italian artist's small-scale still lifes have a profound impact on Kulicke and give him the confidence to paint again [fig. 3]. They also leave an indelible impression on York, who will go on to paint still lifes and landscapes for the remainder of his career.

The three hundred Morandi paintings are for the artist's first US retrospective [fig. 4], which opens in 1957 at the World House Galleries, a second- and third-floor space at the Carlyle Hotel designed by Frederick Kiesler. The exhibition later travels to the Phillips Memorial Art Gallery in Washington, DC.

1959

York meets Virginia Mann Caldwell, his future wife, at a party in an artist's loft in New York City. Around this time he resumes painting and drawing, after a hiatus of six or seven years.

1960

In the spring and early summer York takes Virginia and her two children on a four-month trip to France. They spend a month in Paris but only one afternoon at the Louvre, because, in York's words, "the Louvre is so huge, and we had the youngsters with us, and they kept disappearing." From Paris they travel south, first through Sens, whose Gothic cathedral York had read about in Élie Faure's *History of Art*, then to Toulon, where they spend three weeks before continuing on to Sanary. During their month there, York observes tank traffic, a sign of the Algerian War raging across the Mediterranean. Shortly before running out of money, they return to Toulon, where York resumes painting in earnest, taking his paintbox into the fields. Unlike the Impressionists, however, he has no interest in reproducing specific landscapes. Instead his paintings are small and dark, with a predominance of green and blue halftones. "I would see this tree or that tree, and put it down on the panel, but rearrange the whole thing," he later tells Tomkins.



Fig. 3: Robert Kulicke. *Untitled*, 1958. Oil on Masonite. 11 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 9 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches; 30 x 25 cm. Private collection

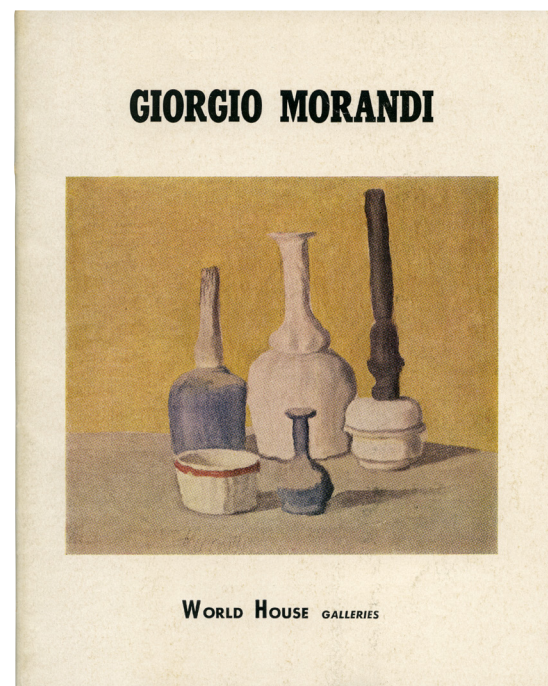


Fig. 4: Catalogue of the retrospective exhibition "Giorgio Morandi: Paintings, Drawings, Etchings 1912-1957" at World House Galleries, New York, 1957



Fig. 5: Albert Pinkham Ryder. *The Forest of Arden*, c. 1888-97, reworked c. 1907. Oil on canvas. 19 x 15 inches; 48 x 38 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest of Stephen C. Clark, 1960

In the late summer York, Virginia, and her children return to New York on the final voyage of the *SS Liberté*, an ocean liner seized from Germany and rechristened at the end of the Second World War.

In October Albert York and Virginia Caldwell marry. He moves into the apartment she is living in with her two children on East 84th Street, where they reside for the next two years.

York returns to work for Kulicke Frames, where he starts arriving at 5:00 AM in order to leave early and paint before it gets dark. He frequently paints in Central Park on small wooden panels, occasionally gluing canvas to them first.

He begins spending his free time in museums, especially the Metropolitan Museum of Art, feeling an affinity for works

by the Ashcan School painters George Bellows, John Sloan, Robert Henri, and George Luks. He also develops a reverence for Manet, Cézanne, and the Old Masters, including Giovanni Bellini, whose *St. Francis in the Desert* at the Frick Collection leaves a profound impression on him.

Another artist whose work leaves an impression is Albert Pinkham Ryder [fig. 5]. Of a temporary installation of American paintings by Ryder, Eastman Johnson, Winslow Homer, and others at the Met, York later recalls to Tomkins, “The Ryders were the only ones that really held up, for me. They were so small, but so strong that they outdid everything else in the room. The whole universe was there in those small pictures.”

A co-worker sees a few of York’s paintings and persuades him to show them to Robert Kulicke.

Kulicke tells his friend Roy Davis about York. Kulicke and Davis studied together at the Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia in the 1940s. In 1952 Davis moved to Manhattan and opened Davis Galleries on the ground floor of a townhouse at 231 East 60th Street. According to Corbett, his was the first business on a block now filled with antique stores and restaurants. Davis showed Kulicke’s picture frames and began exhibiting the work of artists he had known from Tyler, like realist painter Seymour Chwast, illustrator David Levine, and portrait painter Aaron Shikler, whom Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis commissions in 1970 to paint the official White House portrait of the late President.

1962

York, Virginia, and his two stepchildren move to East Hampton on Long Island, renting a small house on Darby Lane. York commutes by train to the city five days a week to work for Kulicke Frames.

Roy Davis invites York to join the roster of artists at Davis Galleries.

Pop art breaks into the contemporary scene. Curator Peter Selz moderates a discussion between author Dore Ashton, curator Henry Geldzahler, critic Hilton Kramer, poet Stanley Kunitz, and art historian Leo Steinberg.



“Pop Art, currently a source of lively controversy among artists, collectors, and critics, will be the subject of a symposium at the Museum of Modern Art on Thursday, December 13, at 8:30 PM,” reads the first line of the museum’s press release.

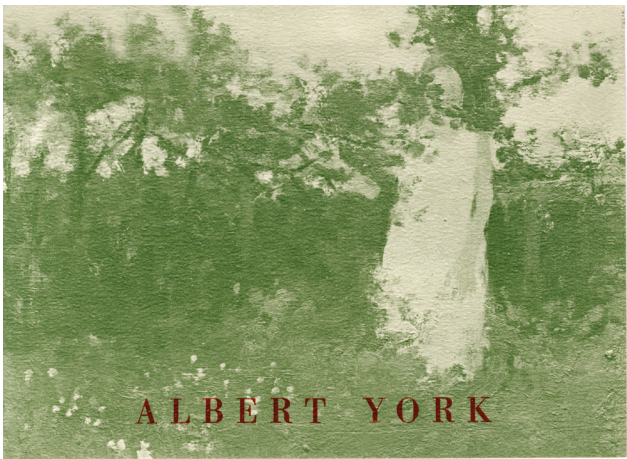
1963

“Paintings by Albert York,” the artist’s first one-person exhibition, opens at Davis Galleries in March [fig. 7]. The exhibition receives positive reviews, including one by artist and critic Lawrence Campbell in that month’s *Art News* [fig. 6]. Campbell calls York “a new discovery,” writing that his paintings “are direct experiences but he strikes unerringly for the dominant qualities in what he sees. The result is a total painting experience.” Most of the works in the exhibition are sold, each for between \$150 and \$400.

With the commute to the city becoming too burdensome, York quits his job at Kulicke’s frame shop and takes up carpentry work and house painting in the East Hampton area. To support his family, he also starts making more paintings, mostly on scraps of wood salvaged from construction sites where he works during the day. Every so often he delivers paintings in person to Davis Galleries, unsigned and untitled, in a paper bag. Soon he stops coming to New York altogether, instead wrapping his paintings in brown paper and sending them to the gallery by regular mail.

**Albert York** [Davis; March 25-April 13] is a new discovery. He has blushed unseen in East Hampton for some time, and studied at the Ontario College of Art. He was born in Detroit. His small paintings of fields, trees, ponds, a bird, a bull, a face or two, a figure in front of a wood, shine with the poetry of a Ryder; and without looking much like a Ryder, either. They are beautiful, at least the small paintings are; the larger paintings were not ready in time for the preview except for one of a boy puckering his lips like a well-known portrait by Duveneck. York is master of a beautiful Notre-Dame-des-Champs green, and the secret of his success lies in his handling it as though it were brown or red. He is a specialist in very tiny, important differences: a thread of blue sky above the trees, a small distinct distinction between light and dark, an apt precision in spacing and placement. The paintings are direct experiences but he strikes unerringly for the dominant qualities in what he sees. The result is a total painting experience. L.C.


Fig. 6: Review of York’s first solo exhibition written by Lawrence Campbell for *Art News*, 1963



**PAINTINGS BY ALBERT YORK**

MARCH 25 THROUGH APRIL 13, 1963

1. TWIN TREES	10½ x 10¼ inches
2. FIELD OF FLOWERS	9½ x 11¼ inches
3. LANDSCAPE WITH TREE	7¾ x 9¾ inches
<i>Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Jason Robards, Jr.</i>	
4. DAY DREAM	8¾ x 11¼ inches
5. FIGURES IN A FIELD	8 x 10 inches
<i>Lent by Judge and Mrs. Abraham J. Gellenoff</i>	
6. YOUNG GIRL	30 x 18 inches
7. SPRING	9 x 10¼ inches
<i>Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph D. Scheerer</i>	
8. COUNTRY FENCE	5¾ x 8¾ inches
9. THE PIGEON	7½ x 10 inches
10. GIRLIN WHITE	10¾ x 7½ inches
11. THREE TREES, EASTHAMPTON	9 x 10¾ inches
<i>Lent by Mrs. Janet Cantor</i>	
12. STREAM IN EASTHAMPTON	9 x 10¾ inches
13. YOUNG BOY	27 x 15 inches
14. REFLECTIONS IN THE POND	24 x 20 inches
15. SUMMER TREES	11¼ x 12½ inches
16. THE BRUSH	8½ x 11¼ inches
17. EDGE OF FOREST	10½ x 10¼ inches
18. SUMMER DAY	8 x 10½ inches
<i>Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Kulicke</i>	
19. THE BULL	9½ x 12¾ inches



**DAVIS GALLERIES**

231 EAST 60 STREET NEW YORK CITY

Fig. 7: Davis Galleries announcement for York’s first one-person exhibition, 1963





Fig. 8: *Girl with Braid*, c. 1964. Oil on canvas mounted on wood. 8½ x 7½ inches; 22 x 19 cm. Private Collection



Fig. 9: *Woman in Black Coat*, c. 1964. Oil on canvas. 14½ x 10 inches; 37 x 25 cm. Private collection

# ALBERT YORK

## RECENT PAINTINGS


### OILS

1. WHITE LIGHT, EAST HAMPTON
2. THE SEA, EAST HAMPTON  
*Lent by Mr. and Mrs. David Steine*
3. TRAWLER OFF EAST HAMPTON
4. TWO TREES, EAST HAMPTON  
*Lent by J. L. Hudson Co. Collection*
5. FARMHOUSE WITH RED BARN
6. THE BLUE HOUSE  
*Lent by Mr. and Mrs. William Heyman*
7. IMAGINARY PARK
8. LATE AFTERNOON
9. THE VISITOR
10. GIRL WITH BRAID  
*Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Howard Kopet*
11. OSTRICH FEATHERS
12. SPRING, EAST HAMPTON
13. KITCHEN PLANT
14. THE MEADOW, EAST HAMPTON  
*Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Morton D. Elkind*

### WATER COLORS

15. COTTAGE, EAST HAMPTON
16. BRUSH, EAST HAMPTON
17. ORCHARD, EAST HAMPTON
18. HOUSES, EAST HAMPTON
19. HOUSE ON HOOK POND, EAST HAMPTON

APRIL 28 THROUGH MAY 29, 1964



## DAVIS GALLERIES

231 EAST 60 STREET
NEW YORK CITY

Fig. 10: Davis Galleries announcement for York's second one-person exhibition, 1964

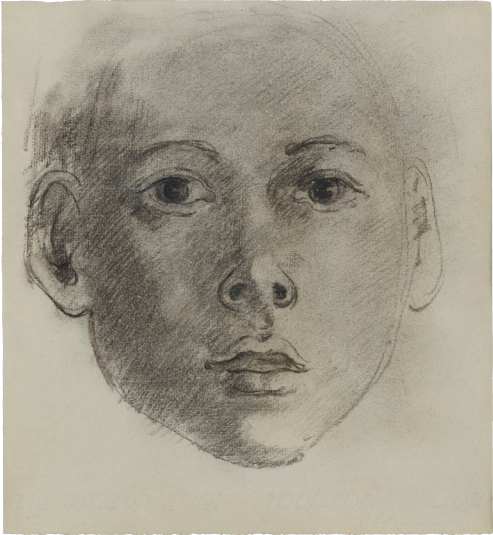


Fig. 11: *Study of a Young Boy*, c. 1968. Charcoal on paper. 10¾ x 9½ inches; 26 x 24 cm. Private collection

1964

“Albert York: Recent Paintings,” his second one-person exhibition, opens at Davis Galleries [fig. 10].

York paints rare portraits of his wife [*Woman in Black Coat*, fig. 9] and stepdaughter [*Girl with Braid*, fig. 8].

1965

The painter and critic Fairfield Porter selects York for inclusion in “Eighteen Painters: Invitational Exhibition” at the Parrish Art Museum in Southampton.

1968

York’s fourth one-person exhibition, “Albert York: A Selection of Oils, 1963–1968,” opens at Davis Galleries. His work is also included in the exhibition “American Sculptors and Painters” at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam.

Around this time York moves with his family into Virginia’s parents’ former house on Sag Harbor Road in East Hampton and draws a rare portrait of his stepson [*Study of a Young Boy* fig. 11].

1972

York’s father, dying of cancer, tells him his mother is still alive. Residing in Florida and working as a real-estate broker, she contacted York’s father after the recent death of her then husband and expressed a desire to see her son. York later recalls to Tomkins, “Meeting her for the first time was pretty rough,” but eventually they establish a relationship.

In the early 1970s York introduces new elements into his paintings, including Native Americans and figures clad in nineteenth-century clothing. Images of snakes, introduced in the late 1960s, become more prominent.

He also starts spending more time in the East Hampton Library reading books on art history, some of which give him ideas for paintings. With few live models at his disposal, York uses Manet’s *Olympia* as inspiration for *Reclining Female Nude with Cat* (1978) [plate 3]. “I didn’t copy it. Just painted from memory. That’s why you get that chunky figure.”



Fig. 12: *Seated Woman in Landscape*, 1973. Oil on Masonite. 8½ x 9⅝ inches; 22 x 24 cm. Private collection

Roy Davis begins a partnership with Meredith Long under the name Davis & Long Company. They move their gallery from East 60th Street to a larger space on Madison Avenue.

1973

York’s father passes away, and he accompanies his mother to Canada to settle the estate. There he paints a picture of her seated on grass [*Seated Woman in Landscape*, fig. 12]. After a few years his mother sets up a trust fund, from which he receives a small income, enough money that in later years he will make fewer paintings for his gallery to sell.

1975

“Albert York: A Loan Exhibition” opens at Davis & Long Company. It includes forty-seven pictures, nine of which are for sale. The exhibition catalogue contains an essay by the painter Fairfield Porter. In it Porter writes that York “identifies with his subject, whether a tree, a cow, a glass of flowers, or the woods. But not only with the subject: he also identifies with his materials, and with the translation of the identification with the cow into an identification with the paint he uses to present the cow.”

1979

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, acquires *Landscape with Two Indians* (1978) [plate 34], a gift of the American



Fig. 13: Albert York at his home, June 19, 1979

Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters through its Hassam and Speicher Purchase Funds.

1980

The Sheldon Museum of Art (formerly Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery) at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, acquires two paintings by York: *Flying Figure in Landscape* (c. 1967) [plate 18], a gift of the Anna R. and Frank M. Hall Charitable Trust, and *Columbia* (1978) [plate 35], a gift of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

1981

Virginia sells their home on Sag Harbor Road and buys an old house in Philadelphia to be nearer to her daughter. York rents a studio in Philadelphia to be nearby but gives up after three months, moving back to Long Island alone.

Werner H. Kramarsky acquires his first York painting, *The Grey Dog* (c. 1967) [plate 19], which he will donate in 2006 to the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

1981–83

York spends two years living apart from his wife, making

occasional trips to visit her in Philadelphia on weekends and holidays. He rents a series of houses in the East Hampton area and, for a few months, outside Narragansett, Rhode Island.

He is prolific during this solitary period. In 1982 he paints at least fifteen paintings, one of which, *Landscape with Three Trees*, is later acquired by artist Susan Rothenberg. Another, *Geranium in Blue Pot with Fallen Leaf and Bird* [plate 58], is purchased by Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis.

In November 1982 the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston mounts York's first one-person museum exhibition. Organized by Kenworth Moffett, the museum's first curator of modern and contemporary art, it includes twenty paintings and is on view from November 26, 1982, to February 27, 1983. The exhibition is concurrent with a small group survey, "Contemporary Realist Painting: A Selection," which includes another painting by York, *Landscape with Two Indians*, 1978 [plate 34], a work the museum acquired four years prior. The museum also has a Fairfield Porter retrospective on view at the same time.

In his *New York Times* review of the Porter exhibition, John Russell writes, "Visitors to the Boston show should not miss the little exhibition of recent figurative painting. This has been designed as a postscript to the Porter show, and it includes the first museum showing in any depth of paintings by Albert York. Even in the Boston Museum, which has great painting the way centipedes have feet, Albert York looks very good."

Werner Kramarsky acquires *Three Red Tulips in a Landscape with Horse and Rider* (1982) [plate 4], which he donates to the Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill (formerly in Southampton) in 1989.

Several paintings from this period, including *Landscape with Two Pink Carnations in a Glass Goblet* (1983) [plate 56], feature a new element in York's work: still life juxtaposed with landscape.

1983

Linda Cathcart, curator and director of the Contemporary Art Museum in Houston, includes York's work in the exhibition "American Still Life 1945–1983." The show, which



features work by Milton Avery, Hans Hoffman, Jasper Johns, and Andy Warhol, among others, travels to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, the Columbus Museum of Art in Ohio, the Neuberger Museum in Purchase, New York, and the Portland Art Museum in Oregon.

Cathcart expresses a desire to meet with York and to mount a full retrospective of his work, neither of which happens.

Sherman Lee, director of the Cleveland Museum of Art, acquires the painting *Bird with Dead Moth* (1982) [plate 42] for the museum.

1984

Susan Rothenberg selects York for inclusion in the exhibition “Artists Choose Artists III” at CDS Gallery in New York.

1985

York has a one-person exhibition at Davis & Langdale Company, which has moved back to 231 East 60th Street, the original location of Davis Galleries. The exhibition, which includes thirty-five paintings, receives a positive review from Michael Brenson in *The New York Times*. “What makes the simplicity so powerful is that the artist’s timing and understanding are perfect,” Brenson writes. “He may use several forms, he may place trees and flowers in different pictorial planes, but all the forms and planes finally become one image, one moment. These are immensely satisfying works.”

1988

York has a one-person exhibition at Davis & Langdale Company, including thirty paintings spanning the length of his career. Michael Brenson writes a passionate review of the exhibition for *The New York Times*, accompanied by a reproduction of one of York’s paintings [fig. 14].

The American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters presents York with its Award in Art. He is included in two group exhibitions at the Academy, “Paintings and Sculpture by Candidates for Art Awards” and “Exhibition of Work by Newly Elected Members and Recipients of Awards.”

1989

Curator Klaus Kertess includes twelve paintings by York in his Parrish Art Museum exhibition “Painting Horizons: Jane Freilicher, Albert York, April Gornik.” Afraid that York might refuse to participate, Roy Davis and Cecily Langdale discourage Kertess from contacting him directly. Shortly before the exhibition closes, however, York visits it and leaves in despair. He later confesses to Tomkins, “I felt pretty upset about what I’d been doing for these last years. It’s pretty lousy — pardon the word — work. Pretty bad. It has no relation to good painting. I don’t recognize myself in those things. I would like to do better. But, of course, it’s there, and probably I will never be able to change it.”

1992

The exhibition “Albert York: Paintings, 1963–1991” opens at Davis & Langdale Company. Holland Cotter, in his review for *The New York Times*, writes of *Two Pink Anemones in a Glass Vase in a Landscape* (1982) [plate 43], “When he sets two salmon-colored anemones in a clear glass goblet against a distant range of dark hills, the image feels monumental and emblematic, and it invites the viewer to consider how expansive a world a miniaturist sensibility can encompass.”

Davis & Langdale Company receives the last painting York will ever send to the gallery, a still life with flowers. York continues making drawings until his death in 2009.

1993

A one-person exhibition, “The Paintings of Albert York,” opens at Mills College Art Gallery in Oakland, California. Organized by the San Francisco-based poet, critic, and curator Bill Berkson, the exhibition includes twenty-four paintings spanning York’s career, from *Twin Trees* (c. 1963) [plate 5] to *Flowers in a Landscape* (1992) [plate 54]. In a brochure accompanying the exhibition, Berkson writes that York’s work, “with its peculiar stability, seems ever on time.”

1995

York gives Calvin Tomkins his only interview. In the resulting *New Yorker* profile, Tomkins characterizes York as “the most highly admired unknown artist in America.” When Tomkins poses the crucial question “Why do you



# Albert York Abides in His World With Grand Aloofness

**A**LBERT YORK IS A STRANGE case. This reclusive painter of deliberate, dreamlike landscapes, still lifes and portraits was born in Detroit in 1928. He went to art school in Canada and Michigan. He moved to New York City in the early 1960's and studied briefly with Raphael Soyer. He has lived for more than 20 years on the east end of Long Island, where he has witnessed more than his share of development and change. Not much more is known about him.

According to his dealer, Leroy Davis, who has been showing his work since 1963, York almost never comes into the city, makes no effort to keep up with contemporary art and hardly ever visits galleries and museums. He paints every day and finishes almost nothing. Mr. Davis says York has made 11 paintings in the last three years. And we are not exactly talking Julian Schnabel scale here: the average York painting is around 10 inches square. But then Mr. Davis cannot know for sure. He has never been in York's studio. He has not seen York in at least six years.

Nevertheless exhibitions are scheduled. Sooner or later the artist sends along a few paintings — on plywood, masonite, tin or canvas board — in a brown paper bag; they arrive without titles or frames. Since there is

## He is proof that an artist can shun the limelight and make art that matters.

never enough for an entire show of new work, paintings from earlier shows are borrowed. Every exhibition — including the one at the Davis & Langdale Gallery, at 231 East 60th Street, through March 30 — is something of a mini-retrospective.

York may not be widely known by the general art public but painters know very well who he is. Fairfield Porter, another painter with a passion for Long Island light, wrote about him. He was selected by Susan Rothenberg for the "Artists Choose Artists" show at the CDS Gallery in 1984. He is as much of a perfectionist in his own way as Myron Stout, another reclusive painter obsessed with the relationship between figure and ground. To maintain his search for the absolute, York, like Stout, needed space and time that cannot be found in the city. He is proof that it is always possible for an artist to stay out of the

limelight and make art that matters.

No one should be under any illusions about what this involves. York is anything but a primitive. He is steeped in 19th-century French art, particularly Manet, but also van Gogh, Gauguin and Cézanne. There is a lot of the 50's and 60's in his work, including an irony not all that different from that of Jasper Johns and a commitment to the kind of pictorial integrity and discipline characteristic not only of Stout but also of Ellsworth Kelly.

The quiet, self-effacing tone of his work is both genuine and deceiving. There is a privacy and isolation — and sometimes, particularly in the trees, a modesty and shame — that suggest Watteau. But York is also nervy, even hip. When he blends artists like Manet and Gauguin, it is unexpected. So is presenting Father Time as a woman. So is painting holes through dense foliage of summer trees so that sky is visible and the world closes in.

One of York's main achievements is his ability to use traditional themes and sources in a convincing way without concealing, attacking or mocking them. This alone suggests the complexity of his intensely economical works. For example, there is a continuing tension between real and imaginary. Are

*Continued on Page 35*



The painter's "Landscape With Two Trees" (1985)—a passion for light.

### Continued From Page 33

the flowers and trees in those fields painted from nature or dreamed?

The uncrowded compositions, the abstractness and the glow of his light create an impression of innocence and purity. But there is also muted, even murky color and the construction of a hybrid artistic world in which everything is meticulously measured and pictorially resolved but nothing fits. York's quiet work is an arena in which corruption deepens and innocence endures.

The exhibition includes 30 paintings that span 25 years and fill one small gallery. The 1964 "Farmhouse, East Hampton," with its roofs, windows, doors and trees closing and opening

like an accordion, has intimations of Vermeer. On the east end of Long Island, artistically identified with painters such as Jackson Pollock and Larry Rivers who are known for their responsiveness to music, York makes paintings in which interval and rhythm are indispensable.

The 1978 "Reclining Female Nude With Cat" suggests how rich his economical work is. With its naked reclining woman and its cat, it is clearly based on Manet's "Olympia." Instead of inviting us to untie the ribbon around her neck, York's nude wears a slipper she is eager to flick off. The rose is over her right ear, not her left. The setting is less a closed room than a cave. In his patient, respectful way, York lets us know that Manet's subversive painting is being subverted.

Instead of a black cat at the far right, York has painted a cat as big as a wolf, and it is not so much the woman's pet as her guardian. Indeed it may actually be half-cat, half-wolf, which leads back not to Manet but to Gauguin, whose reclining female nudes painted in the South Pacific occasionally had canine companions. The cat-wolf suggests danger. So does the woman's left arm and hand, which slither towards and over her genital area like a snake. This perennial symbol of temptation, fertility and sin is a regular in York's landscape. This 9½-by-12-inch painting has a fascination out of all proportion to its size.

The "Skeleton and Nude in a Landscape" from around 1968 is also allegorical in an unexpected and puzzling way. A naked woman seated beneath a tree admires herself in a hand mirror. Facing her, and almost in a mirror position, is a skeleton holding a scythe. The deathly figure is staring at the young woman but apparently not seen by her.

The painting develops the familiar vanitas theme of the effects of time and the inevitable disintegration of the flesh, but there are twists. For one thing, the figure of death is a woman, which reinforces the sense of the young woman's eventual decay.

More surprising is the ambiguity about who is looking in the mirror. It is possible that the young woman is holding the mirror for the skeleton and the figure of time and death is vain. This opens up a field of possible interpretations that are humorous and sinister. What is sure is that darkness seems to blow through the ripe landscape like a summer wind.

Indeed York's work is filled with images of bloom and decay. In the paintings of trees in a field, the different shades of green suggest both. In addition, while the trees are always in flower, the trunks are spindly, and they seem to float. After nature erupts, its roots vanish.

Continuity fights against rupture. In the remarkable still lifes, cultivated house flowers can seem as tall as trees. Other flowers bloom in cans or glasses. Proud Indians, the indigenous population of the east end of Long Island, hover over York's landscape like ghosts. Cows, in all their wholesome bulk, are ethereal but unforgettable presences.

In this vanishing world, painting has a role. If what is here today may be gone tomorrow, every stroke matters. York's brush strokes are often conspicuous, and they move across paintings like lines on a map. In the 1985 "Landscape With Two Trees," the brushwork not only builds but also caresses the image. Its authority is also a statement that looking and painting matter.

The dialogue between figure and ground has very much to do with place. In a painting like the 1987 "Landscape With Three Trees and Pond," the need to make sky and trees fit, and the ferocious attention to every edge at which they intersect, suggest why York can only paint slow and why such small paintings can have such weight. As much as any artist in the mainstream, he is helping to preserve enduring possibilities of painting that have been around since Pompeii — as vehicles of laughter, wonder and doubt, and as mortar for holding change and permanence together.



paint?” York replies, “I think we live in a paradise. This is a Garden of Eden, really it is. It might be the only paradise we ever know, and it’s just so beautiful, with the trees and everything here, and you feel you want to paint it. Put it into a design. That’s all I can say. It’s been a rather trying business, this painting.”

1996

In April *Geranium in Blue Pot with Fallen Leaf and Bird* (1983) [plate 58] and two other York paintings are included in the Sotheby’s auction “The Estate of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis.” The three paintings sell for six to eight times their estimated values of less than \$5,000.

1998

Bruce Hainley, in an article on York for the summer issue of *Artforum*, writes about the paintings and their “duration of vision — time, the memory of time, the specific lunar radiance of dreams, all caught in paint.” He goes on to compare York’s paintings, particularly their “properties of paint, color and facture,” to the work of Brice Marden, and he writes that York’s “compressions are intense temporal and art historical negotiations similar to Joseph Cornell’s, who also is often made quaint rather than daring.”

2001

Werner Kramarsky selects York as the recipient of the Francis Greenburger Award. The award, an unrestricted prize of \$10,000, was established for artists who, in the opinion of their nominators, should be better known to the public.

The author and illustrator Edward Gorey (1925–2000) leaves the painting *Dandelions in a Blue Tin* (1982) [plate 44] in his will to the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Connecticut. Gorey was an admirer of York’s and owned five of his paintings. He dedicated his 1985 book *The Prune People II* to York and professed to Tomkins that he would “buy anything of York’s, sight unseen, if anything were available.”

2007

York’s last one-person exhibition during his lifetime opens at Davis & Langdale Company.



Fig. 15: Albert York’s last home, Southampton, New York

2009

York dies of cancer, at age 80, in Southampton, New York, on October 27.

On November 1 *The New York Times* publishes an obituary by Roberta Smith under the headline “Albert York, Reclusive Landscape Painter, Dies at 80.” Smith writes, “Mr. York’s paintings evoke a world in which time and art seem to stand still or even move backward through history.”

2010

A small monograph on York is published by Pressed Wafer Press of Boston. The book, which includes an essay by William Corbett, receives a glowing review from the *Boston Globe*’s art critic Sebastian Smee in the blog *Zoland Poetry*. Smee, recipient of the 2011 Pulitzer Prize for criticism, describes Corbett’s essay as “the best piece of writing on art I’ve read for several years.”

As an appendix to Corbett’s catalogue, the sculptor Robert Grosvenor, an avid collector of York’s work, writes “Our 3 Yorks are unframed—sometimes I put them on narrow shelves or else support them with four pins. [...] They’re just there as I think York might have looked at them.”

“Albert York: A Memorial Exhibition” opens at Davis & Langdale Company.



## EXHIBITION HISTORY

### *One-person exhibitions*

1963

“Paintings by Albert York,” Davis Galleries, New York, March 25–April 13

1964

“Albert York: Recent Paintings,” Davis Galleries, New York, April 28–May 29

1966

“Albert York: Oils,” Davis Galleries, New York, May 17–June 10

1968

“Albert York: A Selection of Oils, 1963–1968,” Davis Galleries, New York, April 2–20

1975

“Albert York: A Loan Exhibition,” Davis & Long Company, New York, February 22–March 22

1977

“Albert York,” Davis & Long Company, New York, October 12–November 5

1978

“Albert York: Recent Paintings,” Davis & Long Company, New York, October 2–28

1982

“Albert York,” Davis & Langdale Company, New York, October 12–November 6

“Albert York,” Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, November 26–February 27, 1983

1985

“Albert York: Paintings,” Davis & Langdale Company, New York, April 6–27

1988

“Albert York,” Davis & Langdale Company, New York, March 2–30

1992

“Albert York: Paintings 1963–1991,” Davis & Langdale Company, New York, March 24–April 25

1993

“The Paintings of Albert York,” Mills College Art Gallery, Oakland, California, February 4–March 14

1995

“Albert York: A Loan Exhibition,” Davis & Langdale Company, New York, May 3–June 9

1998

“Albert York: Paintings and Drawings, a Loan Exhibition,” Davis & Langdale Company, New York, April 25–June 12

2001

“Albert York: A Loan Exhibition,” Davis & Langdale Company, New York, April 7–May 5

2002

“Albert York: Fifteen Paintings,” Nielsen Gallery, Boston, February 2–March 23

2004

“Albert York: A Loan Exhibition, with a Selection of Recent Drawings,” Davis & Langdale Company, New York, October 9–November 13

2007

“Albert York: A Loan Exhibition,” Davis & Langdale Company, New York, March 3–31

2008

“Albert York,” T&S ‘n Kreps, New York, November 8–December 20

2010

“Albert York: A Memorial Exhibition,” Davis & Langdale Company, New York, April 10–June 11

2013

“Albert York: A Loan Exhibition,” Davis & Langdale Company, New York, April 27–June 21

“Albert York: A Small Selection,” Davis & Langdale Company, New York, June 21–July 26

### *Group exhibitions*

1965

“Eighteen Painters: Invitational Exhibition, Selected by Mr. Fairfield Porter,” Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York, August 8–29

1968

“American Sculptors and Painters,” Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam

1970

“Artists of Suffolk County, Part IV: The New Landscape,” Heckscher Museum, Huntington, New York, November 13–December 27

1975–78

“Painterly Representation,” Ingber Gallery, New York, November 18–December 13, 1975; toured to Arnot Art Museum, Elmira, New York; The Art Academy of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio; Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan; Connecticut College, New London, Connecticut; Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, New York; Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington, Indiana; Swain School of Design, William W. Crapo Gallery, New Bedford, Massachusetts; Vassar College Art Gallery, Poughkeepsie, New York; Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, North Carolina; Windham College, Putney, Vermont

1976

“Cows,” Queens Museum, New York, July 17–September 12

1978

“Hassam Purchase Fund Exhibition,” American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, New York

1980

“Hassam Purchase Fund Exhibition,” American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, New York

1981

“Still Life Painting by East End Artists,” Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York, March 29–May 17

“Object of the Month,” Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, November

1982

“American Modernist Still Lifes,” Salander-O’Reilly Galleries, New York

“Contemporary Realist Painting: A Selection,” Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, November 30–February 27, 1983

1983–84

“American Still Life: 1945–1983,” Contemporary Art Museum, Houston, September 20–November 20, 1983; toured to Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, December 10,

1983–January 15, 1984; Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio, April 27–May 20, 1984; Neuberger Museum, Purchase, New York, June 7–September 15, 1984; Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon, October 9–December 9, 1984

1984

“Art & Friendship: A Tribute to Fairfield Porter,” Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, New York, April 14–June 3; toured to Artists’ Choice Museum, New York, July 7–September 9; New Britain Museum of American Art, Connecticut, September 24–November 4

“Artists Choose Artists III,” CDS Gallery, New York

1985

“American Art Today: Still Life,” The Art Museum of Florida International University, Miami, January 18–February 20

“Waterworks: The Long Island Legacy,” Heckscher Museum, Huntington, New York, September 8–October 27

1988

“Paintings and Sculpture by Candidates for Art Awards,” American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, New York, February 20–March 27

“Exhibition of Work by Newly Elected Members and Recipients of Awards,” American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, New York, May 18–June 12

“Drawing on the East End, 1940–1988,” Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York, September 18–November 13

1989

“Epiphanies,” Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, January 28–February 25

“Painting Horizons: Jane Frielicher, Albert York, April Gornik,” Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York, July 30–September 17

“Albert Pinkham Ryder: The Descendants,” Washburn Gallery, New York, November 7–December 2

1990

“Face Off,” Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, November 10–December 2

“Twentieth Century Long Island Landscape Painting,” Art Museum at Stony Brook, New York

“Long Island Landscape Painting: The Twentieth Century,” Heckscher Museum, Huntington, New York

1993–94

“Landscape as Metaphor: The Transcendental Vision,” Fitchburg Art Museum, Fitchburg, Massachusetts, June 19–November

- 11, 1993; toured to Newport Art Museum, Newport, Rhode Island, January 8, 1993–February 20, 1994; Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, Maine, March 6–April 24, 1994
- 1994  
 “Long Island Landscape: A New Era,” Lizan Tops Gallery, East Hampton, New York, September 4–25  
 “Songs of the Earth: Twenty-Two American Painters of the Landscape,” AHI Gallery, New York
- 1995  
 “Inaugural Exhibition,” Tremaine Gallery at the Hotchkiss School, Lakeville, Connecticut
- 1996  
 “In Pursuit of the Invisible,” Mercy Gallery, Windsor, Connecticut, May 20–June 15
- 1999  
 “The Flag in American Art,” Sheldon Museum of Art at University of Nebraska, Lincoln, May 30–August 28
- 2000  
 “Reconfiguring the New York School,” Center for Figurative Painting, New York, November 11–January 27, 2001
- 2002  
 “Curious Terrain,” Elizabeth Harris Gallery, New York, January 3–February 2  
 “Maureen Gallace and Albert York,” Nielsen Gallery, Boston  
 “More than Skin and Bones: Portraits Invitational,” Nielsen Gallery, Boston  
 “Grey Gardens,” Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, June 6–July 9
- 2003  
 “Lyrical Landscapes,” Widener Gallery at Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, September 12–October 22  
 “March Winds and April Flowers,” Nielsen Gallery, Boston
- 2004  
 “Self-Reliant Spirit,” Nielsen Gallery, Boston, January 21–February 20
- 2005  
 “Multiflorous: A Spring Affair,” Edward Thorp Gallery, New York  
 “Works on Paper,” Davis & Langdale Company, New York
- 2008  
 “Loners and Mavericks,” Nielsen Gallery, Boston, June 21–August 2
- 2009  
 “American Landscapes: Treasures from the Parrish Art Museum,” Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York, September 27–November 29  
 “Recent Acquisitions,” Davis & Langdale Company, New York, November 14–December 23
- 2010  
 “Town and Country,” Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York, June 17–August 13  
 “Parallel Starts: Outsider Art Inside Collections,” Sheldon Museum of Art at University of Nebraska, Lincoln, August 6–October 17
- 2011  
 “Recent Acquisitions,” Davis & Langdale Company, New York, March 19–April 23
- 2012  
 “Borrowed Time,” Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, October 15–January 12
- 2012  
 “Gallery Selections,” Davis & Langdale Company, New York, November 13–January 12, 2013
- 2013  
 “Gallery Selections,” Davis & Langdale Company, New York, October 1–December 21



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1964

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1965

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1970

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1975

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- 1999
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- 2001
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- 2002
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2007

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2011

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2012

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2013

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## CATALOGUE OF WORKS

The following information has been compiled from resources available at the art reference libraries of the Frick Collection, the Museum of Modern Art, the New York Public Library, and the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, as well as with the generous assistance of the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution, the Cleveland Museum of Art, Davis & Langdale Company, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Parrish Art Museum, the Sheldon Museum of Art, the Wadsworth Atheneum, and the individual lenders who helped to make this exhibition possible.

Every effort has been made to provide complete cataloguing for each work. This may not have been possible in all cases, especially for works and exhibitions from the more distant past. This is a first attempt at a thorough cataloguing, and additional information will undoubtedly emerge.

All works are in private collections unless otherwise noted. Artwork titles, which were not assigned by the artist himself, are subject to variation, and every effort has been made to address any inconsistencies. Mediums have been standardized wherever possible. (For example, works previously listed as “oil on panel” or “oil on wood panel” have been replaced with “oil on wood.”) Dimensions for each work are listed with height preceding width.

Exhibitions are divided into one-person and group exhibitions, and are listed chronologically. The abbreviations (venue, year) refer to the exhibition history on pages 174–6. An exhibition is only mentioned here if the work was actually on view. Sometimes a work listed in an exhibition catalogue was not actually exhibited (because plans to exhibit it did not materialize, for instance). No explicit reference is made to such inconsistencies.

All literature entries are listed in chronological order, and their abbreviations (publisher, year of publication) refer to the bibliography on pages 177–9.

—Gilles Heno-Coe

Works in the exhibition are indicated by a (\*).

1.

*Self Portrait with Heads of Two Cats and Two Dogs*, 1979

Charcoal on paper

24 x 18 $\frac{7}{8}$  inches; 61 x 48 cm

2.\*

*Woman and Skeleton*, c. 1967

Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite

12 x 11 inches; 31 x 28 cm

### ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Long, 1975, 1977

Davis & Langdale, 1982, 1988

Mills College, 1993

Davis & Langdale, 1995, 1998, 2001

### GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Parrish, 1989

Edward Thorp, 2012

### LITERATURE:

Davis & Long, 1975, n.p., cat. no. 34 (as *Father Time Viewing Vanity*)

Davis & Long, 1977, n.p., cat. no. 34, ill. (as *Vanity*)

Davis & Langdale, 1982, n.p., cat. no. 35 (as *Father Time Viewing Vanity*)

Davis & Langdale, 1988, n.p., cat. no. 4, ill.

*Art in America*, 1988, p. 174, ill. in color

Parrish, 1989, cat. no. 14, n.p., ill. in color

Mills College, 1993, n.p., ill.

Davis & Langdale, 1995, front cover, ill. in color

Davis & Langdale, 2001, n.p., ill. in color

*Hanging Loose*, 2009, front cover, ill. in color

Pressed Wafer, 2010, n.p., ill. in color

3.\*

*Reclining Female Nude with Cat*, 1978

Oil on wood

9 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 12 $\frac{5}{8}$  inches; 24 x 32 cm

### ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Long, 1978

Davis & Langdale, 1988, 1995, 2007, 2010

Mills College, 1993

Nielsen, 2002

T&S 'n Kreps, 2008

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

American Academy, 1988b  
Parrish, 1989

LITERATURE:

Davis & Long, 1978, n.p., cat. no. 19  
Davis & Langdale, 1988, n.p., cat. no. 10, ill.  
American Academy, 1988, n.p., cat. no. 76  
Parrish, 1989, cat. no. 16, ill. in color  
Mills College, 1993, n.p.  
Pressed Wafer, 2010, n.p., ill. in color

4.★

*Three Red Tulips in a Landscape with Horse and Rider*, 1982  
Oil on wood  
15⅝ x 14¼ inches; 39 x 36 cm  
Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Werner Kramarsky, 1989.8

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1982, 1988  
Museum of Fine Arts, 1983  
Mills College, 1993

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Guild Hall (and tour), 1984  
American Academy, 1988b  
Parrish, 1989, 2009

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1982, n.p., cat. no. 21, ill.  
Guild Hall, 1984, p. 9, fig. 10, ill.  
Davis & Langdale, 1988, n.p., cat. no. 18  
American Academy, 1988, n.p., cat. no. 72  
*Art in America*, 1988, p. 172, ill. in color  
Parrish, 1989, cat. no. 20, n.p., ill. in color  
Mills College, 1993, n.p., ill.  
Parrish, 1998, cover, ill. in color  
Pressed Wafer, 2010, cover, ill. in color

5.★

*Twin Trees*, c. 1963  
Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite  
10⅞ x 10½ inches; 28 x 27 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis, 1963

Davis & Long, 1975, 1977

Davis & Langdale, 1982  
Museum of Fine Arts, 1983  
Mills College, 1993  
Nielsen, 2002  
T&S 'n Kreps, 2008

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Guild Hall (and tour), 1984  
American Academy, 1988a, 1988b  
Edward Thorp, 1989  
Tibor de Nagy, 2010

LITERATURE:

Davis, 1963, cat. no. 1  
Guild Hall, 1984, p. 9, fig. 9, ill.  
Davis & Long, 1975, n.p., cat. no. 1  
Davis & Long, 1977, n.p., cat. no. 1  
Davis & Langdale, 1982, n.p., cat. no. 27, ill.  
American Academy, 1988a, n.p., cat. no. 80  
American Academy, 1988b, n.p., cat. no. 8  
Mills College, 1993, n.p.  
Pressed Wafer, 2010, n.p., ill. in color

6.

*Edge of the Forest*, c. 1963  
Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite  
10½ x 10¾ inches; 27 x 27 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis, 1963  
Davis & Long, 1975, 1977  
Davis & Langdale, 1982, 1985, 1992, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2007,  
2010, 2013a  
Mills College, 1993

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Parrish, 1965  
Heckscher, 1970  
Parrish, 1989

LITERATURE:

Davis, 1963, cat. no. 17  
Heckscher, 1970, p. 19, cat. no. 38  
Davis & Long, 1975, n.p., cat. no. 4  
Davis & Long, 1977, n.p., cat. no. 6  
Davis & Langdale, 1982, n.p., cat. no. 29  
American Academy, 1988a, n.p., cat. no. 78

American Academy, 1988b, n.p., cat. no. 9  
Parrish, 1989, cat. no. 10, n.p., ill. in color  
Mills College, 1993, n.p.  
Pressed Wafer, 2010, n.p., ill. in color

7.

*Summer Trees*, c. 1963  
Oil on canvas mounted on wood  
11 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 13 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches; 30 x 34 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis, 1963  
Davis & Long, 1975, 1977  
Davis & Langdale, 1988, 1998

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Heckscher, 1970

LITERATURE:

Davis, 1963, cat. no. 15  
Heckscher, 1970, p. 19, cat. no. 37, ill.  
Davis & Long, 1975, n.p., cat. no. 7  
Davis & Long, 1977, n.p., cat. no. 9  
Davis & Langdale, 1988, n.p., cat. no. 1

8.★

*The Meadow, East Hampton*, c. 1964  
Oil on wood  
10 x 10 $\frac{5}{8}$  inches; 25 x 26 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis, 1964  
Davis & Long, 1975, 1977  
Davis & Langdale, 1985, 2004, 2007, 2010  
T&S 'n Kreps, 2008

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Parrish, 1989

LITERATURE:

Davis & Long, 1975, n.p., cat. no. 10, ill.  
Davis & Long, 1977, n.p., cat. no. 11  
Parrish, 1989, cat. no. 11, ill. in color  
Pressed Wafer, 2010, n.p., ill. in color

9.

*Late Afternoon*, c. 1964  
Oil on wood  
7 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 11 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches; 20 x 30 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis, 1964  
Davis & Long, 1975, 1977  
Davis & Langdale, 1982, 1992, 2007, 2010, 2013a

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Parrish, 1965  
Parrish, 1989

LITERATURE:

Davis, 1964, front cover, ill.  
Davis & Long, 1975, n.p., cat. no. 18, ill.  
Davis & Long, 1977, n.p., cat. no. 16  
Davis & Langdale, 1982, n.p., cat. no. 31  
Parrish, 1989, cat. no. 12, n.p., ill. in color  
Pressed Wafer, 2010, n.p., ill. in color

10.★

*Pink and White Flowers in Glass Container*, 1965  
Oil on wood  
10 x 8 inches; 25 x 20 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis, 1966 (as *Summer Flowers*)  
Davis & Long, 1977  
Davis & Langdale, 2010

11.★

*Two Zinnias*, c. 1965  
Oil on canvas mounted on wood  
9 x 10 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches; 23 x 27 cm

EXHIBITIONS:

Davis, 1966, 1968

12.

*Straw Flowers in Tin Container*, c. 1966  
Oil on canvas mounted on wood  
10 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 10 inches; 27 x 25 cm



ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis, 1966

Davis & Long, 1975, 1977

Davis & Langdale, 2001, 2013a

LITERATURE:

Davis & Long, 1975, n.p., cat. no. 24

Davis & Long, 1977, n.p., cat. no. 25

13.★

*Buttercups and Green Leaves*, c. 1966

Oil on wood

12½ x 11⅞ inches; 32 x 30 cm

14.

*Zinnias in Ceramic Jar*, 1966

Oil on wood

11½ x 9½ inches; 29 x 24 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Long, 1977

LITERATURE:

Davis & Long, 1977, n.p., cat. no. 28

15.★

*Seated Woman with a Stork by a Pond in a Landscape*, 1966

Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite

10½ x 9½ inches; 27 x 24 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Nielsen, 2002

T&S 'n Kreps, 2008

16.★

*Landscape with Trees and Snake*, 1967

Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite

12 x 11 inches; 31 x 28 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Long, 1977

Davis & Langdale, 1988, 1995, 2001, 2004, 2010

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1988, n.p., cat. no. 7

Davis & Langdale, 2001, n.p., cat. no. 3, ill. in color

17.

*Two Women in Landscape*, c. 1967

Oil on wood

9½ x 10¾ inches; 24 x 27 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1988, 2010

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1988, n.p., cat. no. 5 (as *Two Girls Reclining Under Bush*)

18.

*Flying Figure in Landscape*, c. 1967

Oil on canvas

14 x 13 inches; 36 x 33 cm

Sheldon Museum of Art at University of Nebraska, Lincoln

Anna R. and Frank M. Hall Charitable Trust H 39

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1982, 2007

Museum of Fine Arts, 1983

Mills College, 1993

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Fitchburg (and tour), 1993–94

Sheldon, 2010

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1982, n.p., cat. no. 38, ill.

Mills College 1993, n.p.

Fitchburg, 1993

Davis & Langdale, 2007, front cover, ill. in color

Pressed Wafer, 2010, n.p., ill. in color

19.

*The Grey Dog*, c. 1967

Oil on wood

9 x 10⅝ inches; 23 x 26 cm

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Gift of Werner H. Kramarsky 696.2006

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Long, 1975, 1977

Davis & Langdale, 1985

Mills, 1993

Nielsen Gallery, 2002

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Parrish, 1989

LITERATURE:

Davis & Long, 1975, n.p., cat. no. 30  
*Art in America*, 1988, p. 174, ill. in color  
Parrish, 1989, cat. no. 13, ill. in color  
Mills College, 1993, n.p., ill.

20.

*White Roses in a Glass Jar*, c. 1968

Oil on wood

12¾ x 11⅝ inches; 32 x 30 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis, 1968

Davis & Long, 1975, 1977

Davis & Langdale, 1982, 1985, 1992, 1998, 2001, 2010

Museum of Fine Arts, 1983

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

American Academy, 1988a

American Academy, 1988b

LITERATURE:

Davis & Long, 1975, n.p., cat. no. 38 (as *White Chrysanthemums in Glass Jar*)

Davis & Long, 1977 (as *White Chrysanthemums in Glass Jar*)

Davis & Langdale, 1982, n.p., cat. no. 36 (as *White Chrysanthemums in Glass Jar*)

American Academy, 1988a, n.p., cat. no. 79

American Academy, 1988b, n.p., cat. no. 7

21.

*Landscape with Bushes*, c. 1969

Sepia wash and ink on paper

12 x 11¾ inches; 31 x 30 cm

22.

*Landscape with Fence and Bushes*, c. 1969

Oil and canvas mounted on Masonite

12½ x 11 inches; 32 x 28 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Long, 1975, 1977

Davis & Langdale, 1985, 1995, 2007, 2010

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Ingber (and tour), 1975–78

LITERATURE:

Ingber, 1975, n.p., pl. no. 7, ill.

Davis & Long, 1975, n.p., cat. no. 42

Davis & Long, 1977, n.p., cat. no. 44

*Hanging Loose*, 2009, n.p., ill. in color

23.

*Landscape with Dirt Road, High Bank and Three Trees*, c. 1969

Oil on wood

9¾ x 10¼ inches; 25 x 27 cm

24.★

*Field with Trees*, c. 1969

Oil on wood

11¼ x 11¾ inches; 29 x 30 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Long, 1975

LITERATURE:

Davis & Long, 1975, n.p., cat. no. 44

25.★

*Tropical Landscape with Palm and Snake*, c. 1969

Oil on canvas mounted on board

12 x 10½ inches; 31 x 27 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Long, 1975, 1977

Davis & Langdale, 2007, 2010

LITERATURE:

Davis & Long, 1975, n.p., cat. no. 43

Davis & Long, 1977, n.p., cat. no. 45

26.★

*Farm Landscape*

c. 1970

Oil on board

7 x 10⅝ inches; 18 x 26 cm

EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Long, 1977  
Davis & Langdale, 1998

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 2013

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1998, n.p., cat. no. 18  
Davis & Langdale, 2013, n.p., ill. in color

27.

*Two Anemones in a Glass*, 1970  
Oil on canvas mounted on board  
11 1/8 x 8 1/2 inches; 28 x 22 cm

28.★

*Cow*, c. 1972  
Oil on board  
9 x 10 1/4 inches; 23 x 26 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Long, 1975, 1977  
Davis & Langdale, 2013a

LITERATURE:

Davis & Long, 1975, n.p., cat. no. 51, ill.  
Davis & Long, 1977, n.p., cat. no. 53

29.★

*Wheelbarrow*, 1974  
Oil on wood  
7 x 11 1/4 inches; 18 x 29 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 2010

LITERATURE:

Pressed Wafer, 2010, n.p., ill. in color

30.

*Cow*, 1975  
Oil on board  
12 1/8 x 11 3/4 inches; 31 x 30 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Long, 1977  
Davis & Langdale, 1998, 2004

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Queens, 1976

LITERATURE:

Queens, 1976, n.p., cat. no. 73  
Davis & Long, 1977, n.p., cat. no. 61., ill.

31.★

*Brown Dog and Grey Dog*, 1977  
Oil on Masonite  
9 3/4 x 12 1/4 inches; 25 x 31 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Long, 1978

LITERATURE:

Davis & Long, 1978, n.p., cat. no. 7 (as *Brown Dog & Gray Dog in Landscape*)

32.

*Red Roses in Glass Jar*, 1978  
Oil on wood  
12 3/8 x 10 inches; 31 x 25 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Long, 1978  
Davis & Langdale, 1982, 1985, 1995, 2004, 2007, 2010  
Nielsen, 2002  
T&S 'n Kreps, 2008

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

American Academy, 1988a  
American Academy, 1988b

LITERATURE:

Davis & Long, 1978, n.p., cat. no. 16  
Davis & Langdale, 1982, n.p., cat. no. 44  
American Academy, 1988a, n.p., cat. no. 75  
American Academy, 1988b, n.p., cat. no. 10  
*Hanging Loose*, 2009, n.p., ill. in color



33.

*Two Men on a Moonlit Road*, 1978

Oil on Masonite

12 x 9¾ inches; 31 x 25 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Long, 1978

Davis & Langdale, 1985, 1992, 2001, 2004, 2010

Mills College, 1993

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

American Academy, 1988a

American Academy, 1988b

LITERATURE:

Davis & Long, 1978, n.p., cat. no. 9

American Academy, 1988a, n.p., cat. no. 71

American Academy, 1988b, n.p., cat. no. 5

Mills College, 1993, n.p.

Leo Press, 2008

34.

*Landscape with Two Indians*, 1978

Oil on wood

12½ x 10¾ inches; 32 x 27 cm

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Gift of the Hassam and Speicher Purchase Funds of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, 1979.657

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Museum of Fine Arts, 1982

Davis & Langdale, 1982

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Museum of Fine Arts, 1982

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1982, n.p., cat. no. 45, ill.

35.

*Columbia*, c. 1978

Oil on wood

12 x 8 inches, 31 x 20 cm

Sheldon Museum of Art at University of Nebraska, Lincoln

Gift of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters,  
U-3061

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1982

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Fitchburg (and tour), 1993–94

Sheldon, 1999

Sheldon, 2010

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1982, n.p., cat. no. 46

Fitchburg, 1993

Sheldon, 2010, n.p., ill. color

36.★

*Landscape with Trees and Snake*, 1980

Oil on Masonite

12½ x 11 inches; 32 x 28 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Long, 1975

Museum of Fine Arts, 1983

Davis & Langdale, 1982, 1988 2013a

LITERATURE:

Davis & Long, 1975, n.p., cat. no. 35

Davis & Langdale, 1982, n.p., cat. no. 9

Davis & Langdale, 1988, n.p., cat. no. 13

37.

*Man in Flames with Angel*, 1981

Watercolor and charcoal on paper

24⅞ x 18⅞ inches; 63 x 49 cm

38.

*A Man, a Woman and a Skeleton*, 1981

Charcoal, pencil, and watercolor on paper

25 x 19 inches; 54 x 48 cm

39.★

*An Indian on Horseback and an Indian Standing by Water in a Landscape*, 1981

Oil on Masonite

14 x 12 inches; 36 x 31 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1982, 1988  
Museum of Fine Arts, 1983  
Nielsen, 2002

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

American Academy, 1988a  
Nielsen, 2004

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1982, n.p., cat. no. 15 (as *An Indian on Horseback and an Indian Standing in a Landscape*)  
Davis & Langdale, 1988, n.p., cat. no. 15 (as *An Indian on Horseback and an Indian Standing in a Landscape*)  
American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, 1988a, n.p., cat. no. 73 (as *An Indian on Horseback and an Indian Standing in a Landscape*)

40.★

*Landscape with Four Trees, Bush and Pond*, 1981  
Oil on Masonite  
14 $\frac{1}{16}$  x 12 inches; 36 x 31 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1982, 1998, 2001  
T&S 'n Kreps, 2008

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1982, n.p., cat. no. 14  
Davis & Langdale, 1988, n.p., cat. no. 14

41.

*Landscape with Four Trees and Pond*, 1982  
Oil on wood  
12 x 10 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches, 31 x 27 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1985

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1985, n.p., cat. no. 1

42.

*Bird with Dead Moth*, 1982  
Oil on wood  
12 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 11 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches; 32 x 29 cm  
Cleveland Museum of Art  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Sanford Feld 1983.104

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1982  
Museum of Fine Arts, 1983  
Mills College, 1993

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1982, n.p., cat. no. 24, ill.  
Mills College, 1993, n.p.  
Pressed Wafer, 2010, n.p., ill. in color

43.★

*Two Pink Anemones in a Glass Vase in a Landscape*, 1982  
Oil on Masonite  
14 x 12 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches; 36 x 31 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1982  
Museum of Fine Arts, 1983  
Davis & Langdale, 1992  
Mills College, 1993

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Contemporary Arts Museum (and tour), 1983–84

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1982, n.p., cat. no. 19  
Contemporary Arts Museum, 1983, p. 117, cat. no. 102, ill. in color  
Mills College, 1993, n.p.

44.

*Dandelions in a Blue Tin*, 1982  
Oil on wood  
12 x 10 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches; 21 x 27 cm  
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art  
Bequest of Edward Gorey, 2001.13.73

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1982  
Museum of Fine Arts, 1983

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale Company, 1982, n.p., cat. no. 26

45.★

*Zinnias and Pink Rose in Blue Pot*, 1983

Oil on wood

16⅞ x 13 inches; 42 x 33 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1985

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1985, n.p., cat. no. 10

46.

*Landscape with Red Roses in Glass Goblet*, 1985

Oil on wood

15⅝ x 13½ inches; 40 x 34 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1985

Nielsen, 2002

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Michael Kohn, 2002

Nielsen, 2008

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1985, n.p., cat. no. 12

47.★

*Brown Cow in a Landscape*, 1984

Oil on wood

9⅝ x 13 inches; 24 x 33 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1985, 1995

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1985, n.p., cat. no. 15

48.★

*Brown Cow in Wooded Landscape*, 1984

Oil on wood

14¼ x 14 inches; 36 x 36 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1985

Nielsen, 2002

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1985, n.p., cat. no. 13

49.

*Grey Cow*, 1984

Oil on canvas board

9 x 12 inches; 23 x 31 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1985, 1988, 1992, 2007

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1985, n.p., cat. no. 14

50.★

*Brown Cow*, 1984

Oil on wood

9¼ x 14 inches; 24 x 36 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1985, 1995

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1985, n.p., cat. no. 15

*Art News*, 1985, p. 130, ill.

51.★

*Brown Dog and Clump of Trees in Landscape*, 1985

Oil on wood

11¼ x 10⅞ inches; 29 x 26 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1985, 1992, 2001

T&S 'n Kreps, 2008

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1985, n.p., cat. no. 20

Davis & Langdale, 2001, n.p., ill. in color



52.★

*Two Women and a Cow in a Landscape*, 1986

Oil on canvas board

15½ x 14 inches; 39 x 36 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1988, 2001, 2010

Nielsen, 2002

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1988, n.p., cat. no. 24

53.★

*Moonlit Landscape with Palm Tree*, 1990

Oil on Masonite

10¾ x 12¾ inches; 27 x 31 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1992, 1995, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2007, 2013a

Mills College, 1993

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1992, front cover, ill. in color

Mills College, 1993, n.p.

Pressed Wafer, 2010, n.p., ill. in color

54.★

*Flowers in a Landscape*, 1992

Oil on paper mounted on Masonite

13¼ x 11¼ inches; 34 x 30 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Mills College, 1993

Davis & Langdale, 1995

Nielsen, 2002

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Nielsen, 2004

LITERATURE:

Mills College, 1993, n.p.

55.★

*Landscape with Alligator*, n.d.

Oil on wood

11¾ x 13¾ inches; 30 x 35 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 2013a, 2013b

56.★

*Landscape with Two Pink Carnations in a Glass Goblet*, 1983

Oil on wood

12¾ x 12 inches; 33 x 31 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1985, 1992, 2004

T&S 'n Kreps, 2008

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1985, n.p., cat. no. 8

57.★

*Four Dogs*, 1977

Oil on paper mounted on Masonite

11½ x 10 inches; 30 x 25 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Long, 1978

Davis & Langdale, 1985, 1995, 2007, 2010

LITERATURE:

Davis & Long, 1978, n.p., cat. no. 2

Pressed Wafer, 2010, n.p., ill. in color

58.★

*Geranium in Blue Pot with Fallen Leaf and Bird*, 1982

Oil on wood

18 x 17 inches; 46 x 43 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1982, 1998, 2007, 2013a

Museum of Fine Arts, 1983

Nielsen, 2002

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1982, n.p., cat. no. 23

Sotheby's, "Estate of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis," 1996, p. 508-9,  
ill. in color

Davis & Langdale, 1998, front cover, ill. in color

ArtsEditor.com, March 2002, n.p., ill. in color

Pressed Wafer, 2010, n.p., ill. in color

59.★

*Indian Brave and Indian Chief*, 1978

Oil on Masonite

10¾ x 10 inches; 27 x 25 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Langdale, 1982, 1988, 2001, 2010

Museum of Fine Arts, 1983

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Salander-O'Reilly, 1982

Center for Figurative Painting, 2000–01

LITERATURE:

Davis & Langdale, 1982, n.p., cat. no. 3 (as *Two Indians Standing in a Landscape*)

Davis & Langdale, 1988, n.p., cat. no. 12, ill.

*Art in America*, 1988, p. 177, ill. in color

*Hanging Loose*, 2009, n.p., ill. in color

60.★

*Two Reclining Women in a Landscape* c. 1967

Oil on canvas

10 x 12 inches; 25 x 31 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis, 1968

Davis & Long, 1975, 1977

Davis & Langdale, 1988, 1995, 2010, 2013a

Nielsen, 2002

T&S 'n Kreps, 2008

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

Mercy, 1996

LITERATURE:

Davis & Long, 1975, n.p., cat. no. 35 (as *Two Girls Reclining under a Bush*)

Davis & Long, 1977, n.p., cat. no. 35

Davis & Langdale, 1988, n.p., cat. no. 5 (as *Two Girls Reclining under a Bush*)

Hard Press, 1996, p. 77, ill. in color

ArtsEditor.com, 2002, n.p., ill. in color

*Hanging Loose*, 2009, back cover, ill. in color

*City Arts*, 2010, ill.

Davis & Langdale, 2010, front cover, ill. in color

Pressed Wafer, 2010, n.p., ill. in color

61.★

*Seated Male Nude*, c. 1968

Oil on wood

9¾ x 12½ inches; 25 x 32 cm

ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

Davis & Long, 1977

Davis & Langdale, 1995, 2010, 2013a

Group exhibitions: Tremaine, 1995

LITERATURE:

Davis & Long, 1977, n.p., cat. no. 39

*Albert York* is published to accompany an exhibition at the Matthew Marks Gallery, 523 West 24th Street, New York, from November 8 to December 20, 2014. The exhibition was co-curated by Joshua Mack and organized in cooperation with Davis & Langdale Company.

*When Matthew Marks suggested that we co-curate a York exhibition, we went, as we had more than thirty years ago, to Davis & Langdale. Cecily Langdale and Roy Davis received us with their customary courtliness. This show could not have been realized without their gracious cooperation and the efforts of their staff, Kelly Mara and Meredith Mueller. Nor would it have been possible without the staff at Matthew Marks Gallery, particularly Gilles Heno-Coe and Craig Garrett. Thanks to Bruce Hainley for his essay and his insights, and to Dodie Kazanjian and Calvin Tomkins for allowing us to reprint his New Yorker profile of the artist. York's paintings are treasured by those lucky enough to own them. Our gratitude to the collectors who generously loaned their works and allowed them to be photographed last summer. My particular thanks to Matthew Marks, who told me about York in the first place and asked me to work on this exhibition. And above all, as always, thanks to the artist.*

—Joshua Mack

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## Photography

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